# People & the Planet

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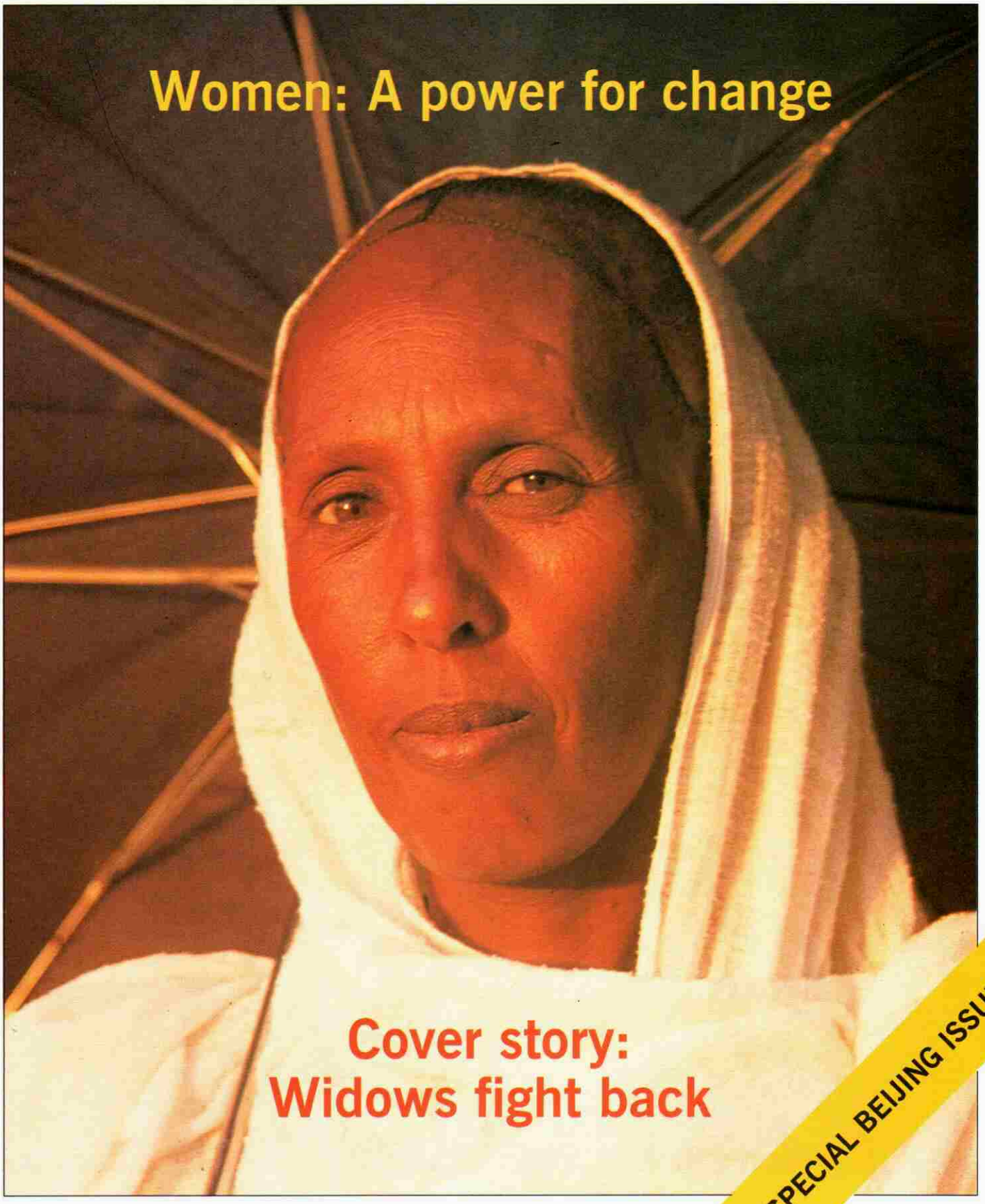

## Women: A power for change

## Cover story: Widows fight back

SPECIAL BEIJING ISSUE

CAROLINE PENN/IPPF

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**Front cover:** *Eritrean widow Nobbiat Okbagabir at a crowded civic education seminar explaining the new constitution. Photograph by Jenny Matthews.*

**Left:** *Community-based family planning distributors of the Sierra Leone FPA, with bales of tie-dyed cloth produced by a local women's group with their help.*

■ **Our next issue debates one of the key issues for the coming century: How can we feed a world of 8 billion?**


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# People & the Planet

## Holding hands

This issue of *People & the Planet* gives no more than a glimpse of the immense potential of women, acting together, to bring about social change. Some examples of this are already well known. Wangari Maathai's Green Belt Movement started a revolution in tree planting in Kenya. The women of the Chipko movement, hugged trees in India to save an entire ecosystem. Here we tell some less well known, but equally encouraging tales.

Women in Costa Rica using radio to save a forest. Women in India defeating the liquor barons to end the scourge of arrack drinking and mobilizing garment workers and street sellers through the power of video. Village women in the Philippines taking charge of their own community health. Migrant women in California fighting the system which exploits them. Widows in many countries, at last finding the strength to stand together to claim their rights.

Women can change the world. But it will not be enough to sit back and watch the struggle. Policy makers, nearly all of them men, will have to listen, and act. The draft plan of action for the Fourth World Conference on Women, soon to be held in Beijing, sets out what needs to be done to improve women's health, education, employment, human rights and environment. It plans, for the first time to define the rights of the 'girl-child'.

However, women are once again having to combat difficulties, even in that arena. The NGO Forum has been transferred by the Chinese authorities to a site far distant from the main conference. And women are having to stand up once again to the opposition of the Catholic Church to some aspects of the Cairo agreement on reproductive health, including the means to make a free choice over childbearing. The latest State of the World Population report from UNFPA once again emphasizes the importance of that choice to women's health and wellbeing.

Thankfully, the imperatives of our time are on the women's side. If we are to feed tomorrow's world, women farmers must be given the rights to land, credit and extension services. If we are to balance population with resources, women must be educated and empowered to earn and to nurture small healthy families.

*John Rowley*


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**The following 'associates' are partners in the development and distribution of** *People & the Planet*:

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# NEWS FILE

## Climate compromise

The First Conference of Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change reached a nervewracking climax in the first week of April, *writes Mick Kelly*.

For much of the meeting, it looked as if the intransigence of a few nations would sabotage efforts to extend the existing agreement to stabilize emissions of greenhouse gases in the major industrialized nations by the year 2000. According to the scientific consensus, emission reduction is essential if the Climate Convention is to have a significant influence on the rate of climate change.

Opposition came from oil-producer nations fronted by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and reluctance to take a stand which might alienate the domestic fossil-fuel lobby by nations such as the United States, Australia and Canada. In the event, a last-minute compromise was reached after two all-night sessions and the Berlin Mandate was agreed.

This recognizes that the existing control requirements are "not adequate" and must be extended into the 21st century. It hands over negotiation of a new agreement to a group of countries representing the major interests at stake – the industrialized nations, OPEC, the small island states, the larger developing nations. The agreement should "aim to set quantified limitations and reductions objectives within specified time-frames." This wording has allowed environmentalists to claim success in placing emission reduction on the agenda. It also allows those with anti-greenhouse lobbyists to satisfy at home, to point to the fact that emission limitation is what is happening anyway under the current agreement.

Many developing nation representatives were disappointed that the draft protocol submitted by the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) was not accepted. The AOSIS protocol would have committed the industrialized nations to a 20 per cent reduction in carbon emissions by the year 2005. The meeting also ruled out the proposal that emission control requirements be extended to the rapidly-industrializing nations such as China and India.

The process of implementing the Climate Convention will now be managed by a permanent secretariat housed in Bonn. The secretariat has been allocated a two-year budget of $19 million. The Conference of the Parties will be an annual event and it is intended that agreement on a protocol covering extended control targets will be reached by 1997.

■ *Dr Mick Kelly is a researcher at the Climate Research Unit, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK.*

## Meltdown

The recent warming of the Antarctic Peninsula has resulted in the break-up of an ice shelf creating a giant new iceberg, roughly the size of Oxfordshire. The British Antarctic Survey's (BAS) Rothera Research Station has discovered that the new iceberg, split from the Larsen Ice Shelf, measures 78 × 37 km, and is around 200 metres thick.

Another ice shelf which used to occupy Prince Gustav Channel and connected James Ross Island to the Antarctic Peninsula has also disintegrated. For the first time in recorded history, it is possible to sail around James Ross Island.

These observations come soon after the discovery of the break-up of the Wordie Ice Shelf on the west coast of the Antarctic Peninsula, also reported by BAS scientists in 1991. There is now little doubt among scientists that the retreat of these ice shelves is a result of a climatic change in the region.

*before . . .*

*. . . after*

BRITISH ANTARCTIC SURVEY

Meteorological records from the BAS's Faraday Research Station have shown a rise in regional temperature by 2.5°C since the 1940s. "There is no doubt that the climate on the Antarctic Peninsula has warmed significantly over the last few decades. What we're seeing now are changes only just working through to glaciers and ice sheets," says British glaciologist, Dr David Vaughan.

If temperature in this region continues to rise by a further 10°C (by the year 2200), this could result in the disintegration of the larger Ronne and Ross ice shelves which are roughly about the size of Spain each. Collapse of these ice shelves could result in land-based ice to fall into the sea and cause a rise in the sea level, possibly by 5 metres. If this happens, then coastal cities such as London could eventually be flooded.

■ *For further information contact BAS, High Cross, Madingley Road, Cambridge CB3 0ET, UK. Tel: +44 1223 251400/61188, Fax: 62616.*

## Women's progress in politics...

UNICEF's latest report on the *Progress of Nations*, published in June, includes a valuable section on Progress for Women. This charts women's political progress and the improvements in their access to health and family planning services.

In a world ranking of women's access to political power, the report finds that worldwide only one elected politician in nine is a woman. This is not good, says the report, but better than the situation half a century ago when women did not even have the vote in most nations.

Top ranking in the league table of women elected to parliaments is taken, in Sub-Saharan Africa, by South Africa with 25 per cent. Iraq comes out top in the Middle East and North Africa with 11 per cent. Bangladesh does best in South Asia with 10 per cent. China is top in East Asia and the Pacific with 21 per cent. Cuba scores best in Latin America and the Caribbean with 23 per cent. Finland scores best among the

industrialized countries with 39 per cent. Of the Countries in Transition, Slovakia is top with 18 per cent.

Worldwide only about 6 per cent of Cabinet positions are held by women.

## ...and the family

Drawing on the Demographic and Health Surveys in 47 countries, the UNICEF report found that while in much of the world the lives of women are largely circumscribed by motherhood, in almost all countries surveyed the time spent looking after young children has fallen in the past decade.

In 28 of the countries surveyed, the percentage of women with no formal education has halved in a single generation.

Views on ideal family size are also changing fast. Women want at least one child fewer than they did 10 or 15 years ago in almost half of the 20 nations for which data is available. But, says the report, family planning does not seem to be keeping pace with demand.

In all but one of the 47 nations surveyed women say their desired number of children is fewer than today's average – usually by at least one child.

■ *Contact your local UNICEF office for a copy of the report.*

## Helping girls in Egypt

The Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA), a non-profit international organization dedicated to women's empowerment, has started a five-year project in Egypt to help girls and young women improve their health, education and life options.

The project is supported by a $6.8 million grant from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in Egypt and will be implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Population and Family Welfare, in partnership with Egyptian non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

LIBA TAYLOR/HUTCHISON LIBRARY
SOURCE: FAO

Egyptian NGOs will develop model community-based programmes in education and health for girls and young women between 5 and 20 years old in Upper Egypt and will encourage governorate and national leaders to advocate for expanded education and health care for this group, including vocational skills.

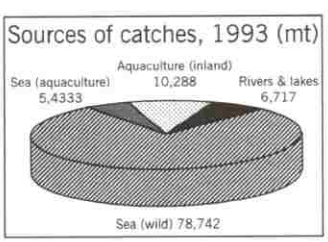
CEDPA and its network of more than 900 women's organizations are committed to expanding women's access, choice and participation in all aspects of life.

■ *For further information, contact Marjorie Signer, CEDPA, 1717 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20036, USA. Tel: +1 202 667-1142, Fax: 202 332-4496.*

## Fish facts

World fisheries are in a crisis, according to a briefing paper by the Panos Institute. For five years the global fish catch has stagnated and its quality declined. The oceans are being plundered for short-term gain without any thought of sustainability, with most fishing grounds seriously overfished.

The recent dispute between Canada and Spain highlighted the overfished waters off Canada's Newfoundland coast. But virtually every commercial species of fish has been depleted, fully exploited or overexploited. Yet overfishing could turn oceans into desert, *writes John Madeley*.

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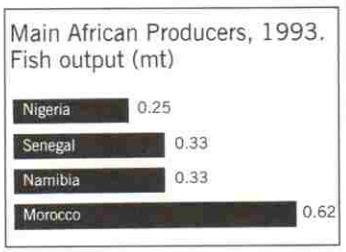



The briefing looks at the effects of overfishing on fish catches and consumption in developing countries. It points out that while fish consumption per person is declining, globally, it is increasing in the North. In parts of the South, however, fish catches and eating are declining with potentially serious consequences for health.

Large vessels are overfishing the South's waters with nets larger than football pitches, and this is damaging their near-shore fishing grounds and cutting the catches of local fishermen. Some 100 million people in developing countries are dependent on fisheries for a living. While fleets from the North usually fish in the South under licence, international piracy, fishing without a licence, is all too common, says the briefing paper.

Fish is by far the chief nutritious food that countries of the South export to the North and some are exporting more of their fish to earn additional foreign exchange. But this means less fish for local people. The briefing suggests that a binding code of conduct is necessary to regulate fisheries.

■ Fish: A Net Loss for the Poor, *Panos Institute, 9 White Lion Street, London N1 9PD, Tel: +44 171 278 1111, Fax: 278 0345.*

## Burden of waste

Making products that last longer is the key to reducing the environmental costs of consumerism, argues the latest report from the UK-based New Economics Foundation (NEF). Recycling is criticized on environmental grounds as inadequate.

The report reveals that over 6 million large kitchen appliances, 3 million vacuum cleaners and 2 million cars are discarded in Britain each year. Unduly short life span adds to the environmental burden of waste.

"The trend for many consumer products, including cookers, vacuum cleaners and small electrical appliances, is towards shorter life," says author Tim Cooper. "But it is possible to reverse this. In Sweden, for example, manufacturers now design cars to last over 17 years compared with the average 12 year life span in Britain."

■ Beyond Recycling: the longer life option, *New Economics Foundation, Vine Court, 112/116 Whitechapel Road, London E1 1JE, UK. Tel: 0171 377 5696. £5.50 (individuals) £10 (institutions).*

## Environmental conferences

European Research Press Environment is holding three environmental conferences in the UK during 1995/6.

The European Environment Conference, to be held at the University of Nottingham, on September 11-12, 1995, will be of interest to NGOs, consultants, researchers and academics, local authorities and practitioners.

A Business Strategy and the Environment Conference will be held at the University of Leeds, September 20-21, 1995. It will concentrate on what industry is doing to improve its environmental performance.

A third conference, the International Sustainable Development Research Conference, will be held at the Manchester Conference Centre, on March 18-19, 1996. This will provide a forum for discussion on ways to develop a more sustainable future.

■ *For further information contact: The Conference Manager, ERP Environment, PO Box 75, Shipley, West Yorkshire, BD17 6EZ, UK. Tel: +44 1274 530408, Fax: 530409.*

**Women's groups are more effective and more visible than ever before. Collectively their actions are changing the lives of people in households, communities and societies throughout the world, says *Jodi Jacobson* in this global report.**

# Women holding hands

In 1985, a jelly-jar of tap water turned Lisa Crawford into an environmental activist. In January of that year, Lisa, a resident of Fernald, Ohio and a self-described 'average person', learned that the well from which she and her family had been drinking since 1979 was contaminated with uranium leaking from a nearby United States Department of Energy (DOE) processing facility.

Although Lisa's water contained 28 times more uranium per unit of water than the level deemed safe according to regulations at the time, local DOE officials initially gave her the proverbial pat on the head and said "everything is under control."

Not content with that answer – "You can't just tell the mother of a four-year-old 'everything's OK' and expect her to walk away," she said – Lisa and her neighbours requested a hearing on the issue. At the hearing, DOE officials again assured the community that nothing was wrong.

"That's when I stood up," Lisa recalls. "I said, 'I have a jar of water from my sink. Will you drink it?' Not one of those government people would drink the water. We knew we had to do something right away." Lisa and her neighbours formed the Fernald Residents for Environmental Safety and Health (FRESH) and began a long and difficult – but ultimately successful – battle to force DOE to close down the facility.

Throughout the world, 'average' women like Lisa Crawford are mobilizing local pressure groups on issues of concern to themselves and their families. Estimates by the US-based Community Clearinghouse on Hazardous Wastes and by environmental advocate Robert Bullard, for example, suggest that women make up roughly 80 per cent of people active in grassroots environmental advocacy in the United States. Their efforts to create safe home and community environments mirror those of women in India, Kenya, Peru, and countless other countries where environmental degradation and contamination is a major and growing concern to family health and welfare.

Environmental justice is but one aspect of a vibrant global women's movement that takes many forms. In fact, over the past several years, an increasingly effective and sophisticated women's movement has begun to fundamentally alter the political calculus on issues of social and economic development, population policy,

FIRE

human rights, and health at the local, national, and international level.

Women's groups, for example, took centre stage at a series of recent United Nations conferences. At the Earth Summit in Rio, women challenged the notion that conventional strategies of economic development are compatible with equity and environmental sustainability. At the Vienna Conference on Human Rights women succeeded in establishing that "women's rights are human rights," adding concerns such as domestic violence and rape to the human rights agenda. And at the International Conference on Population and Development, advocates placed women's health and rights at the centre of population policies.

Moreover, women in virtually every country are engaged in the arduous work of effecting and monitoring real changes in government policies and programmes. National and international women's networks are confronting religious fundamentalism, documenting human rights abuses, and advocating for sexual and reproductive health. Feminist academics are challenging long-held paradigms in anthropology, demography, economics, and other disciplines. And women-led grassroots groups are taking on child marriage and alcoholism, fighting for land reform and property rights, combatting domestic violence, and working to safeguard the rights of migrants and refugees.

Collectively, their actions are changing social dynamics in households, communities, and societies throughout the world, and challenging definitions of progress that don't reflect women's needs and concerns.

Women's groups are more visible and effective than ever before in part because they have studied and adapted for their own purposes the tactics and strategies of communications and lobbying. Increasingly, technology is being used by a wide range of groups to disseminate information on women's rights and health concerns. A growing number of networks both train women to use computers, and help disseminate relevant information. The Network of East-West Women (NEWW), for example, works to foster the use of computers among women in the countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. It has helped them to communicate on a range of issues, including legal rights, economic policies, and job discrimination.

Radio is another avenue for communication. As the experience of Feminist International Radio Endeavor (FIRE) illustrates (see page 8), radio is being adapted to meet women's needs for information, and to create solidarity among women's groups across countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. And film is yet a another. *Something Like A War*, a chronicle of the interplay of India's population policy on women's health and human rights produced by Indian advocates Abha Bhaiya and Deepa Dhanraj, has been seen literally throughout the world.

It is difficult to draw any conclusions about the aims or effects of the global women's movement for social change because these efforts are spearheaded by women with highly diverse backgrounds, experiences, and goals. Nonetheless, some general observations can be made.

Personal experience, for example, is often cited by women as the most powerful impetus to organizing whether at the local or national level. Extensive interviews conducted by the author with more than 40 environmental justice advocates in the United States suggest that, like Lisa Crawford, most are spurred to act in response to environmental threats to the safety of their children, their partners, themselves, and their communities.

The empowering nature of advocacy work is self-reinforcing – it can transform women as individuals, and the movements in which they take part. Interviews with environmental justice advocates, for example, revealed that at the outset, most women organizers do not consider themselves 'feminists' or even 'environmentalists'. Instead, many echo the sentiment expressed by one woman who said "We're just doing our job as mothers." Yet, virtually all describe coming to a realization, somewhere along the way, that they are engaged in a broader struggle for social and economic justice in which gender politics is an important variable.

Giving voice to their own concerns and sharing them with others helps women break the silence around issues that may be seen as culturally or socially taboo, such as domestic violence and sexuality. The voices of individual women from countries across the world first brought to light the scope of gender-based violence, spurring researchers and advocates to look closely at these issues. Their concerns were subsequently raised in international conferences, including the Tribunal on Women's Human Rights at the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, and in international campaigns, such as the 16-day organizing efforts co-ordinated annually by the Centre for Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers University.

Women's advocacy is inherently political because it challenges the status quo. In the United States, for example, efforts to "engender" environmental policy pose fundamental challenges to the values and priorities of the mainstream environmental movement. To women activists, engendering environmental thinking means paying as much attention to the quality of 'inside' and community environments – such as homes, schools, and job sites – as to 'outside' environments such as forests, wetlands, and wilderness.

It means raising awareness of the connections between poverty and environmental health. It means redesigning the methodologies of risk assessment to account for differences in risk based on race, class, and gender. And it means exchanging current patterns of production and consumption for an economic model based on social and economic justice, health, and environmental sustainability.

Such challenges can and do lead to political backlash, and to scapegoating of women and women's groups. In many countries, for example, efforts to raise awareness of women's human rights have been countered by fundamentalist religious and political forces, who often resort to linking the expansion of women's rights with social ills, such as a changes in family structure. Religious opposition to women's voices has played a role in international conferences as well. In the past two years, the Vatican has used its status in the United Nations to lobby against expansion of women's reproductive and sexual rights, and to attack individual groups, such as the US-based Catholics for a Free Choice.

Despite these problems, the global women's movement continues to grow. It is fundamentally about promoting democracy and social justice, and ensuring the participation of people in conceptualizing and carrying out the policies and programmes that affect their lives. ■

*Jodi Jacobson is Director of the Health Development Project in Washington DC.*

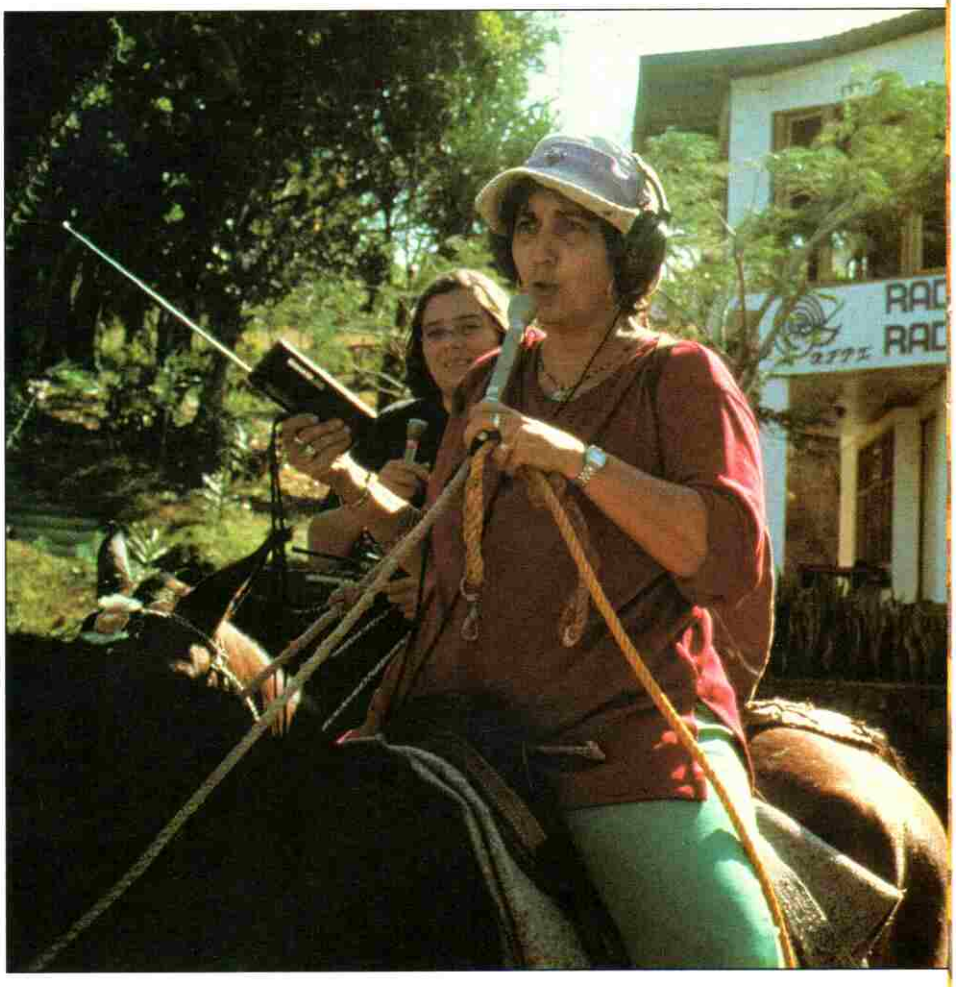
**Left:** *Women reach out to women by radio from the FIRE project in Costa Rica.*

## *Costa Rica*

# A radio voice for women

**Inspired by the Women's Peace Tent at the UN Women's Conference in Nairobi in 1985 – when the need to confront the 'new' world information order with the voices of women was reaffirmed – Feminist International Radio Endeavour (FIRE) was launched in Costa Rica in 1991.**
**Set up with support from the Foundation for a Compassionate Society, FIRE broadcasts for two hours every day in English and Spanish, on its own short-wave radio station, Radio for Peace International, to over 100 countries. Nearer home, it is active in campaigning on environmental and women's issues. Here** *Maria Suarez Toro*, **a FIRE producer, tells how the radio station is struggling to save the last forest reserve left in the Central Valley of Costa Rica.**

**"How can one of the arteries of the last lung left to the city of San José be destroyed with such a road for garbage trucks?"**



BOTH PICTURES: FIRE

When FIRE discovered, earlier this year, that the Costa Rica Government planned to create a huge land-fill site at El Rodeo with its nearby forest reserve, we decided to mobilize women's voices in protest. Under the government project, the rubbish of almost two million people from the capital city of San José, would be dumped at this site.

Local villagers started to protest in January this year, when bulldozers appeared without warning and began to destroy the countryside around a communal 14-kilometre dirt road between the forest reserve and the site chosen for the land-fill at El Cordel.

We, at the radio station, felt involved, not only as women, and because the plan was sprung on the people without any consultation, but because the affected area was right on our doorstep. The dirt road is only 20 yards away from our offices.

El Rodeo hosts the last primary forest reserve near to the city. The 100 acres of forest are only 27 kilometres from San José and are ecologically unique in Central America, coming as they do in the transitional zone between the Pacific and Atlantic coasts. As such it contains a variety of flora and fauna from both regions.

Rich in its diversity of more than 200 varieties of trees, including the Balsam which is on the list of endangered species, the forest is home to animals such as monkeys, deer, toucan and parrots. It also serves the El Rodeo community, peaceful people who have lived there for decades, protecting the forest and growing food.

On the other side of the reserve are the indigenous people of Quitirisi, historical caretakers of the forest for centuries. Today, the surrounding area of the reserve also contains the University of Peace and a stretch of recreational land, where families come at weekends to enjoy themselves.

Threatened with an invasion of garbage trucks which would threaten the peace of this area and the future of

**Left:** *On the airwaves from horseback, Ciudad Colon.*

***Below:*** *Broadcasting from the FIRE studio.*

the forest, what could be done to raise awareness of the danger, at home and abroad?

One Saturday in February, FIRE found a way to link the issues. Using horseback and walkie-talkie radios, the staff of Radio for Peace International organized a live Radio Eco-tour around the forest and through the little village next to it.

An international audience in over 100 countries, including Costa Rica, was brought into the reserve, hearing the sounds of nature, a commentary and the voices of villagers. People left their work or came out of their kitchens to add their voices to the broadcast.

"My ancestors have lived here for many years, ever since my great grandparents came to El Rodeo," said one elderly woman, Doña Ella Quiros. "The Government has never taken us into account. Now when they need a new site for the garbage, we have to be taken into account. It has been said that there is some obscure business going on over the dump site. It is not obscure. It is very clear to me: they are selling out our health, our environment, and our peaceful lives."

A mountain bike rider, breathless from the seven kilometre-ride up the hill from Ciudad Colon, stopped to say on radio that the President, having named himself "the ecological president" should put his hand on his heart and answer "how can one of the arteries of the last lung left to the city of San José be destroyed with such a road for garbage trucks."

The two-hour eco-tour ended by giving the horses a well deserved break, running back to the studio to finish the report 'on air', and bringing in the sounds of bulldozers as the machinery started its destructive work.

Four days later we were broadcasting live again, from a street outside the municipal building where local government delegates from Ciudad Colon were discussing the growing protest over the proposed dump.

We were recording the voices of the people; more than 800 had gathered, carrying flags, banners and placards. Many were urging a plan that each local community should handle its own waste in local land-fill sites. Children joined in, holding up posters, defying the intimidating police presence.

One after the other, the marchers came to the radio car and spoke through our global short-wave walkie-talkie. "This has got to stop" said an 11-year-old protester. "The Government keeps telling us that we have to be responsible for the protection of the environment. What are they (pointing to the closed meeting inside) going to do to take responsibility for our future?"

Three hours later the delegates emerged from the meeting to announce that they would oppose the use of the roads for garbage trucks. But no opportunity for further discussion with the protesters was given.

FIRE then invited the people to call in to the radio station. Within seconds the calls began, an expression of amplified rage as one caller after another expressed their fears and frustration.

A highlight of the 'call in' came from Indiana in the United States: "I am Virginia. I am Costa Rican, but I have lived in America for many years now. I have been listening to my people on your short-wave today. Please tell me how to get to the place. I am coming back to live. I have decided that is where I want to be. I am with you and will be with you in this struggle."

Another caller, from Miami, said that on hearing the people living in the area on the short-wave programme he was really able to grasp the issue: from the direct voices of the people affected by it.

To us that is what global communication should be about. ■

## Preparing for Beijing

**Throughout the Cairo Conference on Population and Development, two reporters from FIRE broadcast daily, giving a voice to women's activists. Their reports were very different from the international media which focused almost exclusively on the conflict between the Vatican, Islamic extremists and the US Administration around the bracketed language in the draft document.**

**FIRE was able to give a voice to the substantial role of women in reshaping the Cairo agenda. It was able to promote the women's agenda which aimed to shift the focus of international population policy towards reproductive and sexual rights, health, women's education and empowerment.**

**Setting up the simple four-piece mobile 'radio station' on any table wherever women in Cairo met, FIRE reached out to women far away from Egypt. "Had it not been for FIRE's live shows, people like me would never have known that was really happening in Cairo" wrote short-wave listener Jaqueline Espinoza from Panama.**

**Now, in the run up to Beijing, FIRE is enhancing its technical capacity and its international networking with other radio women in the media. As in the past, at all sorts of major meetings, FIRE will be there with its mobile, inexpensive and women- friendly studio, amplifying women's voices.** ■

## *India 1*

# Women against arrack

**In a dramatic reworking of the David and Goliath story, poor rural women in the south Indian state of Andhra Pradesh challenged the continued power of the state government, the liquor lobby and corrupt politicians to win a battle against the sale of the country liquor known as arrack, which was destroying their lives. Now they are struggling to maintain that victory.** *Ammu Joseph* **reports.**

**Below:** *Men gather together to drink arrack in Kerala where it is still legal.*

SHANKAR/INDIA TODAY

Within months of the launch of a militant movement spearheaded by women in 1992, the Andhra Pradesh government was forced to ban the sale of arrack, first in Nellore district, where the women's campaign began, and later – from October 1993 – throughout the state.

Although the anti-arrack agitation is a spent force today, thanks to this early fulfilment of its unambiguous goal – the stoppage of arrack sales in villages – its impact continues to be felt all over the country.

During the elections to the state's legislative assembly in November 1994, the regional Telegu Desam party, led by the eccentric filmstar turned politician, N.T. Rama Rao, won a landslide victory over the Congress-I, ostensibly on the strength of two popular election promises which are believed to have helped him corner women's votes: supply of cheap rice and total prohibition of liquor.

Within weeks of taking charge, the new chief minister pushed through an ordinance making the sale and consumption of almost all types of potable alcohol a criminal offence from mid-January 1995. Only 'toddy' (a natural, intoxicating drink extracted from certain varieties of palm) was exempted from prohibition, on the ground that thousands of toddy-tappers would otherwise lose their source of livelihood.

Ironically, although Rao now poses as a champion of total abstinence, it was during his earlier tenure as chief minister that the Varuna Vahini (Flood of Liquor) policy was launched by the state government, promoting the aggressive sale of arrack in rural areas.

> **"In return for a day's work, a family receives no money, only drunken men."**

The crucial role played by liquor, particularly arrack, in the state's political economy is evident from the fact that revenue from alcohol amounted to more than 10 per cent of its annual budget in 1991-92 (when the women's movement began), and that excise duty on liquor constituted the government's second largest source of revenue: approximately 8,400 million rupees. Arrack accounted for nearly three-quarters of that amount.

Apart from this, it is well known that most political parties were heavily dependent on underhand financial contributions from the liquor industry, and that many politicians or members of their families were themselves liquor barons.

While public opinion is divided on the wisdom, feasibility and viability of prohibition by government fiat, almost everyone concedes that the anti-arrack agitation launched by the poorest and the most powerless members of society has had a major impact on the state's political agenda, at least for the present. In addition, the Andhra women's successful struggle against arrack has given new life to movement's against alcohol in other parts of the country.

However, the Nellore women's agitation was different in several respects from the anti-liquor movements that have waxed and waned in various corners of India over the past

few decades. For a start, it began as small localized struggles by women in different parts of Nellore to keep arrack out of their village; the popular slogan they adopted was: "*Ma uriki saara vaddu*" (We don't want arrack in our village).

The several separate struggles were initially linked only by two common factors: women's experience of the debilitating effects of arrack on their personal and social lives, as well as the family economy; and the total literacy campaign, started by the government but carried out by voluntary agencies, which attracted large numbers of women and encouraged them to critically analyse their lives.

Stories about women suffering at the hands of alcoholic husbands ('Seethamma's story', 'Who is responsible for this death?') and women organizing against alcohol ('If women unite') were just a few among the many lessons relating to social issues included in the literacy primers. It is significant that women in different parts of the district independently chose to act upon these rather than any of the others.

At the same time, the Nellore women's struggle had none of the moralistic overtones that characterize most temperance movements. Their opposition was not to alcohol as such but to the new, aggressive promotion of cheap liquor in rural areas, which made arrack – packed in plastic sachets for convenience – readily available in each isolated village, while people still had to trek miles for basic necessities such as drinking water, primary health care and elementary education.

They were angry that communities already plagued by chronic unemployment and low wages were often paid for their labour with coupons exchangeable for liquor at the local arrack shop and that, as a result, even working children were beginning to pick up the drinking habit.

They found it intolerable that hard-earned and scarce resources were increasingly being squandered on arrack. As one women put it, "In return for a day's work, a family receives no money, only drunken men." The significant increase in savings rates in the aftermath of the ban on arrack serves as proof that their limited incomes once went down the liquor drain.

Women were also tired of the daily harassment and abuse they and their children suffered at the hands of inebriated men within and outside their homes, which had driven several of them to suicide. The most common comment made by women on their success in ridding their villages of arrack was: 'Now we have peace of mind.'

As Kondamma of Totla Cheruvupalli village so eloquently said, "Even a cow must be fed if you want milk. Otherwise it will kick you. We have kicked! We will do anything to stop arrack sales here." And they did – adopting innovative strategies to tackle trickery by government officials in cahoots with liquor barons, braving police brutality, and standing firm against all attempts to weaken them and crush their militancy.

Interestingly, the women seemed more comfortable tackling the problem in the public sphere than dealing with it in the privacy of their homes. However, their valiant involvement in the successful movement has apparently had spin-off effects, making them more confident and articulate, upgrading their social position, enabling them to exercise some control over their everyday lives and even, to some extent, altering their relationships with their men.

Unlike many earlier anti-liquor campaigns, this agitation focused on arrack suppliers and traders rather than on consumers. As a result, men were not entirely hostile to the movement, in fact, many passively supported it. The agitating women also received support from several youth groups, especially from among *dalits* (once known as untouchables or outcastes).

Harbouring no illusions about their capacities, the Nellore women consciously restricted their struggle to their own villages. In response to a suggestion that the agitation must grow in scope, one woman said, "No. Our fight stops here. We can take on whatever happens here, but not beyond."

The agitation did have the support of voluntary organizations – especially those involved in the total literacy campaign – and, later, of opportunistic political parties, but a unique feature of the Nellore struggles was that they were led by local women and not by external patrons.

According to K. Lalitha of Anveshi (a Hyderabad-based women's studies organization), the nature of the movement has changed. Leadership has passed on from poor, rural women – opposed simply to the supply of arrack at their doorsteps and prepared to fight tooth and nail against it – to middle class, urban women and men espousing Gandhian ideals and quoting the Constitution to justify their demand for total prohibition. Worse, political parties have hijacked and manipulated the women's agitation to serve their own ends, which may not ultimately benefit the women themselves.

It is not yet clear whether or not the women who have launched and led the anti-arrack agitation, confident about handling the consequences in their own villages, will be in a position to tackle the side-effects of state-wide total prohibition policy.

However, the fact remains that the poorest and most disenfranchised of women from the rural hinterlands of Andhra Pradesh managed to shake the foundations of the powerful, unholy alliance between the state, the liquor lobby and political parties through a movement which drew its strength from its localized nature, its realistic aims and, above all, the dogged determination of its constituents. ■

*Ammu Joseph is a Bangalore-based freelance journalist and consultant who recently co-authored with journalist Kalpana Sharma,* Whose News? The Media and Women's Issues *(Sage Publications).*

## Local seats for Indian women

**Indian women's struggles against alcohol could receive a fillip from the three-tier system of decentralized governance through elected local bodies currently being set up across the country, in which a minimum one-third of all seats is reserved for women. Under the new dispensation, state governments would have to comply with a resolution passed by a Gram Panchayat (village council) for the removal of liquor shops from the territorial boundary of the village.**

## *India 2*

# These women call the shots

**Modern methods of communication are helping to liberate and mobilize women, even in the poorest communities. Here, *Sohaila Abdulali* tells the story of a group of illiterate film-makers in India.**

**"Why should it be difficult for me to make films? I'm used to carrying vegetables."**

Leelabehn Datania's background is a unique preparation for at least one aspect of film-making: carrying the equipment. She had never switched on a light or watched television before she started to learn her new trade, but these things, along with the fact that she cannot read or write, have not deterred this remarkable former vegetable vendor from the slums of Ahmedabad from becoming one of the leading lights of a remarkable film- making collective.

Video SEWA is a collection of women from varied backgrounds who have produced over one hundred films, thirty-nine of them complete and available to the public. Because of the extraordinary women who make them, the films have a tendency to teach you extraordinary things which you would not learn anywhere else. For example, where else but on the Video SEWA training video on smokeless stoves would you find out that women who use ordinary kerosene stoves inhale as much smoke daily as they would if they smoked a packet of cigarettes?

In 1984, the late Martha Stuart, whom the collective members refer to affectionately as "our guru" came to Gujarat from New York and held a video production workshop at SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association). Twenty women, most of them illiterate, took the workshop and began to make films. For three years they had no editing equipment or expertise, so they shot their films in sequence, which is something no ordinary film-maker would attempt. In 1987, they learned to edit and got the necessary equipment. Now there are four permanent staff members, many women who take part as they are needed, and lots of tapes on the shelves.

The women who produced these tapes can conceptualize a script, film, record sound, and edit, but many of them cannot find the tape on the shelf when they need it, because they cannot read or write. How did they learn the intricacies of the equipment?

"I know all the symbols," Leelabehn, who is about 50, says, fondly touching the buttons as she recites, "Fast-forward, rewind, pause..." And, since she could not take notes during any of the workshops, she committed everything to memory before making her first film, *Manek Chowk*. It is an impassioned documentary about the women like her who sell vegetables and fruit on the pavement, and their harassment at the hands of the police. The women of SEWA used this film as part of their campaign for recognition of their status as vendors, and now all the vendors of Manek Chowk have licenses.

PURNIMA RAO

The other three staff members are Darshana D, a graduate from a local university, Darshana P, who used to work in a school, and Neelambehn, a homemaker. Films have been produced by textile workers, flower-pickers and bangle-sellars, among others.

The films are used for different things. Some, like *Manek Chowk*, are

**Below:** *Former vegetable seller, Leelabehn Datania, is now a skilled camerawoman.*

used for raising consciousness and advocacy. Some are training films, such as the films about oral rehydration therapy and building smokeless stoves. The women film significant events at SEWA as well as outside, and their new clips have been used nationally and internationally. They hold regular training courses and have an ambitious plan for communication centres all over India.

Film is a powerful medium, especially in the hands of the powerless. Medina, a young garment worker who had spent her life in purdah, made a film about garment workers in Ahmedabad organizing for better working conditions. When garment workers in the northern city of Lucknow saw the film, they were inspired to take to the streets themselves.

The effects of their new careers on the lives of Video SEWA staff are no less profound. They have had to deal with astonished husbands and neighbours who disapprove of their late hours. "I would get up at three o'clock every morning so I could do all the housework before I went to work, so then my husband could not complain," says Darshana P. "Still he used to get angry at me. Now that some of our films have come on TV, he shows off to people about me: 'my wife uses a camera!'"

The group has enough challenges to keep complacency at bay. Technical know-how is at a premium, as it is hard to find people to help them. They recall a time in a remote village where they were filming a scene when the portable tape-deck stopped functioning. Afraid of lost time, money and opportunity, Darshana P. bought out a screw-driver, took everything apart, and put it back together in perfect working order.

They have had to face the prejudices of the local experts on film equipment, who refuse to hold workshops for illiterate people. They have dealt with the vagaries of the national television net- ▶

## *The Philippines*

**Below:** *Shakribehn is caught on camera selling berries in the market.*

work, which uses their clips sometimes, and censors them at other times.

The cost of making a 20-minute films is about Rs 150,000 ($4,500). All the films are in colour, on professional quality U-matic format, so that they can be used anywhere.

Video SEWA has come far in eleven years. The new generation will work with the old. Martha Stuart's son and daughter come to India once a year to bring the group up to date on the latest technical innovations, and three daughters of SEWA members have joined the staff as apprentices. Manjula is a headloader in the textile market, Aruna organizes contract labourers and Daksha used to sew borders onto saris.

Leelabehn punches the "Play" button and the screen fills with green peas, red tomatoes and purple aubergines. A woman raises her voice and shouts, "Vatana Lo!" – Buy Peas! A familiar sight, given new urgency on film as we are drawn into the problems and triumphs of vegetable sellers.

Four women in saris jump out of an auto-rickshaw, carrying heavy equipment and hastening to record the procession marching along a dusty Gujarat road, cameras whirr. It is an image to remember. And after all, why shouldn't they make films? They have plenty of practice carrying vegetables. ■

*Sohaila Abdulali is a freelance writer with a special interest in women and development.*

# Women of Apelo Cruz

**The story of a Filipino bar girl who is given help and hope through a self-financing community health service, is told here by our correspondent in Manila,** *Linda Bolido.*

At 17, Vilma has been through so much more than most women twice or thrice her age. Married at 13 to an abusive 22-year-old man who beat her up, she was a separated woman after three months, a bar girl by the time she was 14, was pregnant for the first time at 15 although the pregnancy miscarried, and had since has one son and one abortion.

Throughout these traumatic three years, almost everything that happened to Vilma – except perhaps the marriage which she says resulted from her having started to flirt early – was not by her own choice.

She lost her first child without her doing anything, Vilma says. In an almost apologetic voice, she adds, "*Siguro hindi lang malakas ang kapit*" (Maybe the fetus was not securely attached to the womb).

Her having a son was more a decision of her parents who probably had visions of the good life, as the boy's father was a high-spending Arab with whom Vilma lived for seven months. For a while, it seemed to be a wise choice. The boy, now one year and three months old, was well-provided for even after his father returned to his country where he has another family.

Unfortunately, tragedy struck and a car crash left Vilma's lover paralysed and cut off child support.

PURNIM RAO

Vilma's third pregnancy occurred after she lost her bar job and was recruited to work in Japan. Sharing a place with the other Japan-bound women, Vilma told her recruiter of her pregnancy not really knowing what she wanted to do. The recruiter, without asking Vilma, bought 20 pills used for stomach ulcers and forced the young girl to take them all.

In a few minutes, she was feeling nauseous and a short time later bleeding. Instead of taking her to a hospital, the recruiter brought her to the Apelo Cruz health centre in Vilma's old neighbourhood where a relative also worked as a volunteer. The recruiter disappeared just as soon as she had left the very sick girl in the care of the centre's women, who rushed the teenager to a hospital.

Vilma's plight may not be typical of the experiences of the women of Apelo Cruz – a street and also a congested slum area in densely populated Pasay City close to the Philippines capital Manila. But her young life is just a variation on the theme of the powerlessness felt by many women in the community.

It is in an effort to help Vilma and the other women of the depressed community take control of their lives, particularly their health and fertility, that the Apelo Women's Health Association (AWHA) was formally set up in 1991.

As Dr Sylvia Estrada-Claudio, a co-ordinator of the Commission on Women's Health and Reproductive Rights of the General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Integrity, Equality, Leadership and Action (GABRIELA) says, "Women have to understand that their bodies are their own. Any uses of a body should be approved by its owner... Any liberation and empowerment of women is not complete if it does not include control over body and fertility."

The Apelo Cruz exercise, she said, lets women take control of their own health at the community level and also opens their eyes to the possibility of

**Below:** *Poor living conditions add to women's problems in Apelo Cruz.*

LINDA BOLIDO

becoming self-reliant in other areas.

AWHA resulted from a decision of GABRIELA's health commission to transform occasional medical visits to Apelo Cruz where the Samahan ng Kababaihang Nagkakaisa, or Association of United Women, had started to organize the women into a more-or-less permanent health institution by and for the women.

GABRIELA sensed that the very popular medical visits did not help women assume greater control over their own health and wellbeing. The visits gave everything away for free, both services and medicines. Far from becoming self-reliant, GABRIELA noted that the women were developing "a kind of patronage and dependency relationship" with them.

Dr Junice Melgar, the Commission Co-ordinator who oversees the centre's activities, said an all-free system was "a drawback in making women responsible for their own health". She noted that women would go to the clinics even if they were not ill just to get free medicines which they often sold for cash.

Dr Melgar suggested to a not-so-enthusiastic group the setting up of a health co-operative which, while providing services to members, would also require them to pay five pesos (about 20 US cents). The money goes into the purchase of medicines which are sold to members at prices much lower than in pharmacies. In addition,

**". . . Any liberation and empowerment of women is not complete if it does not include control over body and fertility."**

it is also made available to members in the form of modest loans to start a business or for emergencies, including hospital care and even the purchase of basic necessities like rice.

Having been used to handouts, it was hard for many to understand.

Twenty-seven-year-old Remedios de la Tonga, mother of three, says, "Initially I was surprised (at the idea of a regular contribution) but then I realized that the money was returned to me in terms of services."

Marlene Garduque, 22 and mother of two boys, said when services were given free, the better-known and more influential members of the community tended to get priority. The five-peso contribution not only ensures her of attention from the centre but also strengthens her commitment to the Association, she says.

The AWHA health centre also serves as a vehicle to make women aware of other issues. Through a series of monthly education activities, GABRIELA sought to instil in women an understanding of their rights, duties and responsibilities.

Emma Fabella, who heads a team of four health volunteers and now represents AWHA in the Commission, said, "Women in the community are slowly beginning to realize they have rights. While before members were reluctant to open up, (AWHA) has now become the only organization in the neighbour- ▶

## *California*

*continued from page 15*

hood where everybody gets to speak their minds."

Expectant mother Judy Marcos, 35, said AWHA made women appreciate not only the fact that they have "to take care of themselves because they have so many things to do, but to learn such things as how to administer drugs and recognize the signs of cancer". Even sessions on child care and rearing were welcome.

Teresita Mahinay, 21, likes the idea of women being taught that they have rights even within a marriage. "It is right that women should not be forced into sex...and it is also right for women to (formally) complain about abusive men."

Remedios said that, at first, her husband was chary of his wife's being associated with a GABRIELA initiative, as the group had acquired a reputation as being anti-men. But he was eventually won over by the things his wife was learning from AWHA.

Even the prospect of assuming greater control over AWHA, as GABRIELA gradually removes itself from the scene, does not cause panic. Remedios says, "We can be self-reliant as long as people are united."

The women like the idea of taking control over their fertility through contraception.

Emma said at first women were worried about contraception because they believed it had side effects. So rather than prevent a pregnancy, many women resorted to abortion.

Marlene, whose two boys are aged three years and one year and seven months and who had an intra-uterine device (IUD) inserted, said, "Family planning is very useful because I do not have to worry that there will be another child."

Remedios, who candidly admitted she had one abortion through the insertion of a catheter, said failure by women to prevent unwanted pregnancies often forced them to resort to abortion which remains illegal in the Philippines.

Even Vilma has been on the Pill for three weeks now despite her claim that she insists that her clients use a condom. When asked why she feels a need for contraception, the teenager smartly replies, "As you know, the condom can tear or fall off." ■

# Fighting for dignity

**The fight for women's rights and dignity is not confined to the developing world. Immigrant women in the United States and elsewhere are also struggling against exploitation.** *Miriam Ching Louie* **reports.**

TU-MINH TRINH

A noisy picket line of 250 women circles the block in front of garment manufacturer Jessica McClintock Inc's headquarters. Complete with the rhythms of Korean gongs and hourglass drums, red banners with big black Chinese characters demanding "Fairness," "Solidarity," and "Peace," and women wearing Halloween masks to disguise their identity from vengeful employers, the action has been called by Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA) in support of 12 Chinese garment workers.

The seamstresses were left holding $15,000 in worthless paycheques when the sweatshop where they worked went bankrupt shortly after the manufacturer suddenly ended the contract. The women want Jessica McClintock Inc, who contracted the work to the sweatshop owner, to pay their wages.

While McClintock's $145 million-a-year business in women's and children's formal wear, perfume, bed and bath supplies trades in "romanticism" and "femininity," the company's success depends on the far-from-romantic wages paid to Asian immigrant women in Oakland and San Francisco and women in China, Guatemala, the Philippines, Hong Kong and Mexico.

Increasingly transnational corporations are moving production to export processing zones and sweatshops in the South and immigrant communities in the North where they pay the women "Third World wages." Women's sweated labour pumps at the heart of the current economic restructuring process. Corporations increasingly shift production and sales abroad, subcontract out work to contingency workers, bust workers organizations, engage in speculation, mergers and acquisitions, while governments deregulate markets, eliminate or privatize public services, cut corporate taxes, remove worker and environmental protections, and enact anti-immigrant legislation.

In the United States, for example, Asian and Latina immigrant women often toil under 19th century conditions, at piece rates that fall below the minimum wage, 10 to 14 hours a day, six to seven days a week, without overtime, sick leave, vacation pay, or health benefits. Labouring at these wages, many immigrant women work a "triple shift". After a day's work in the shop, they come home to cook dinner for

**Below:** *Mexican seamstresses come from El Paso, Texas, to demonstrate their support for Asian women migrant workers.*

their family, then head back to the factory to do another shift. They often take home work and toil late into the night and on weekends.

To add insult to injury, immigrants are frequently blamed for the loss of jobs and social services; they are made a lightening rod for the politics of insecurity, resentment, xenophobia and hate. In California, for example, voters passed Proposition 187 which denies public education to the children of

**"We want McClintock to show corporate responsibility to the immigrant women workers who made her rich."**

undocumented migrant workers and health care to their families. Implementation of the proposition is being fought in the courts while the US Congress debates cutting off social services for legal immigrants and teenage mothers.

Nevertheless the shift in the global economy and changing demographics of the workforce helped to create groups like AIWA, a community-based labour organization founded in 1983 for women concentrated in the garment, electronics, hotel, restaurant and janitorial industries of the San Francisco Bay Area and Santa Clara County's "Silicon Valley".

In September 1992 AIWA launched the "Garment Workers' Justice Campaign" after laid off seamstresses came to AIWA for help. Conventional wisdom would have buried the workers' hope for their back wages in the contractor's bankruptcy papers. But workers decided to go the next step up the industry pyramid to the manufacturer, whom they identified as Jessica McClintock Inc.

When workers visited McClintock's San Francisco boutique they were shocked to discover that party dresses for which they would have been paid a collective total of $5 were being sold for $175 each. They then decided that it was perfectly within their rights to ask McClintock to pay their back wages and show responsibility for the abuse of the rights of workers in the sweatshops.

AIWA called a meeting of workers, community, labour and student activists to discuss the case and map out a plan of action. The workers developed their organizing skills and leadership potential as they led a consumer boycott, talked to national support committees in cities across the country, delivered testimony to elected officials at community hearings, and spoke out at pickets, and to the media.

AIWA continues to organize around women's work and family schedules. Because most women work Monday through Saturday, AIWA organizes a Sunday school for seamstresses and janitors and a night school for electronics assemblers and hotel maids. Sessions consist of popular literacy classes where workers simultaneously discuss workplace conditions, test out how to stand up for their rights and practice their English. Worker gatherings and campaign meetings organized by AIWA's Membership Board are convened over the dinner hour near the sweatshops and factories.

Solidarity is essential to deal with the globalization of the economy, break isolation and competition between workers and broaden consciousness. AIWA belongs to a sisterhood of worker organizations which includes such groups as the Chinese Staff and Workers Association, Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates, La Mujer Obrera, Fuerza Unida and many others.

The groups organize workers exchanges, consult with each other on organizing strategies and offer concrete campaign support. Participation in the UN End of Decade Women's Conference in Nairobi in 1985, organizing against the North American Free Trade Agreement and preparing for the UN NGO Forum 95 in Beijing, has also enabled AIWA to meet organizers from women workers centres and networks in Mexico, Canada, and throughout Asia.

Bo Yee, a leader of the Garment Workers Justice Campaign and one of the women behind the masks at the first rally against Jessica McClintock, says "We will continue this campaign until we win our demands. We want McClintock to show corporate responsibility to the immigrant women workers who made her rich. We want her to have the respect to sit down with the women and work out the solution to this problem." ■

*Miriam Ching Louie co-ordinates media and research at Asian Immigrant Women Advocates in Oakland, California.*

## *Nigeria*

# Helping women traders

**The World Bank, often criticized for its failure to direct its efforts to the poor and to women at a local level, is supporting a programme of training for women managers in Nigeria, Senegal and Burkina Faso, which is breaking new ground.** *Elizabeth Obadina*, **our correspondent in Nigeria, reports on successes, and problems, in the developing programme there.**

Mrs Mosili Tijani trades in kola nuts, like her mother and her grandmother before her. She's been running her business for 30 years and did not expect to learn many new tricks of the trade after such a long time.

It had been a profitable business. The bitter kola nut is a widely-chewed stimulant and is an essential item of important ceremonials among most of Nigeria's over 250 ethnic groups. The market for it is huge. As a result, Mrs Tijani has been able to equip her grown daughter with a hairdressing salon. However, since 1984 when Nigeria's military rulers seized power the country's economic problems have gone from bad to worse. So have Mrs Tijani's.

She tried to shore up her shaky fortunes by affiliating her local group of kola nut traders as a co-operative with the Country Women's Association of Nigeria, (COWAN), a national organization formed in 1981 to promote improved standards of living in rural and semi-rural areas.

Her group, Orire Ntemi, joined 12 other COWAN branches in Sagamu, a market town in Ogun State, 60 miles north of Africa's biggest city and West Africa's trading capital, Lagos.

Orire Ntemi prospered modestly but it was little more than a talk-shop for traders engaged in the same business. Business declined reflecting a general decade-long economic disintegration, but in 1993 and 1994 Orire Ntemi's fortunes changed for the better. The group was selected by COWAN to participate in the Women's Management Training Outreach Programme (WMTOP), a World Bank initiative aiming to improve the managerial skills of illiterate and semi-literate rural business women and farmers.

"After WMTOP training we no longer did everything individually. We got together. One or two members travelled out to the farms to buy kola, instead of everybody buying their own," says Mrs Mosili Tijani, leader of the Orire Ntemi.

"We used to waste time by all going to market. Now only I go and the others process the new kola. Every November the harvest brings a lot of work but by sharing it we sold more. Our group grew to 18 because we were so successful and a man even asked to join. WMTOP ideas are good for men too."

Mrs Tijani is semi-literate. She used to keep her accounts in her head but after a five-day WMTOP financial management course she taught two members who have been to school how to keep written accounts and issue receipts.

"Now we can see better what's happening to our business," she says, "Our profits are better but because of the economy they are swallowed up by housekeeping and school fees. There's no money left to begin a new business for the in-between times. My neighbours tease me because they know about WMTOP but cannot see the results as I still cannot afford to paint my house or buy new clothes."

Mrs Tijani's predicament reflects both the success and the limitations of WMTOP. Through a series of four modules it has taught women from 58 local groups principles of human resource management, finance and credit, microproject management and marketing.

Participants are full of praise, citing gains as varied as simply getting sons to take their share of 'girl's work' or husbands to tell them where they are going when they leave home, to identifying new business opportunities. Many groups have never held elections for officers before WMTOP training and participants felt this new, small experience of democracy would embolden them to take part in Nigeria's next round of civilian politicking. But these gains were offset by a chronic shortage of funds for business expansion.

The Nigerian scheme is a pilot which has reached 2,600 women since 1993. It is based in Oyo, Ogun and Osun States of western Nigeria, home to 35 million Yoruba people. The training, conducted over a five-day period, uses Yoruba for story telling, role play, case studies including field visits, discussing pictures and short ten-minute talks. Selected local women's groups belonging to five national women's organizations send two delegates to each of the four modules. They are asked to pair an illiterate member with a semi-literate or literate one to aid learning. They also provide most of the project's trainers.

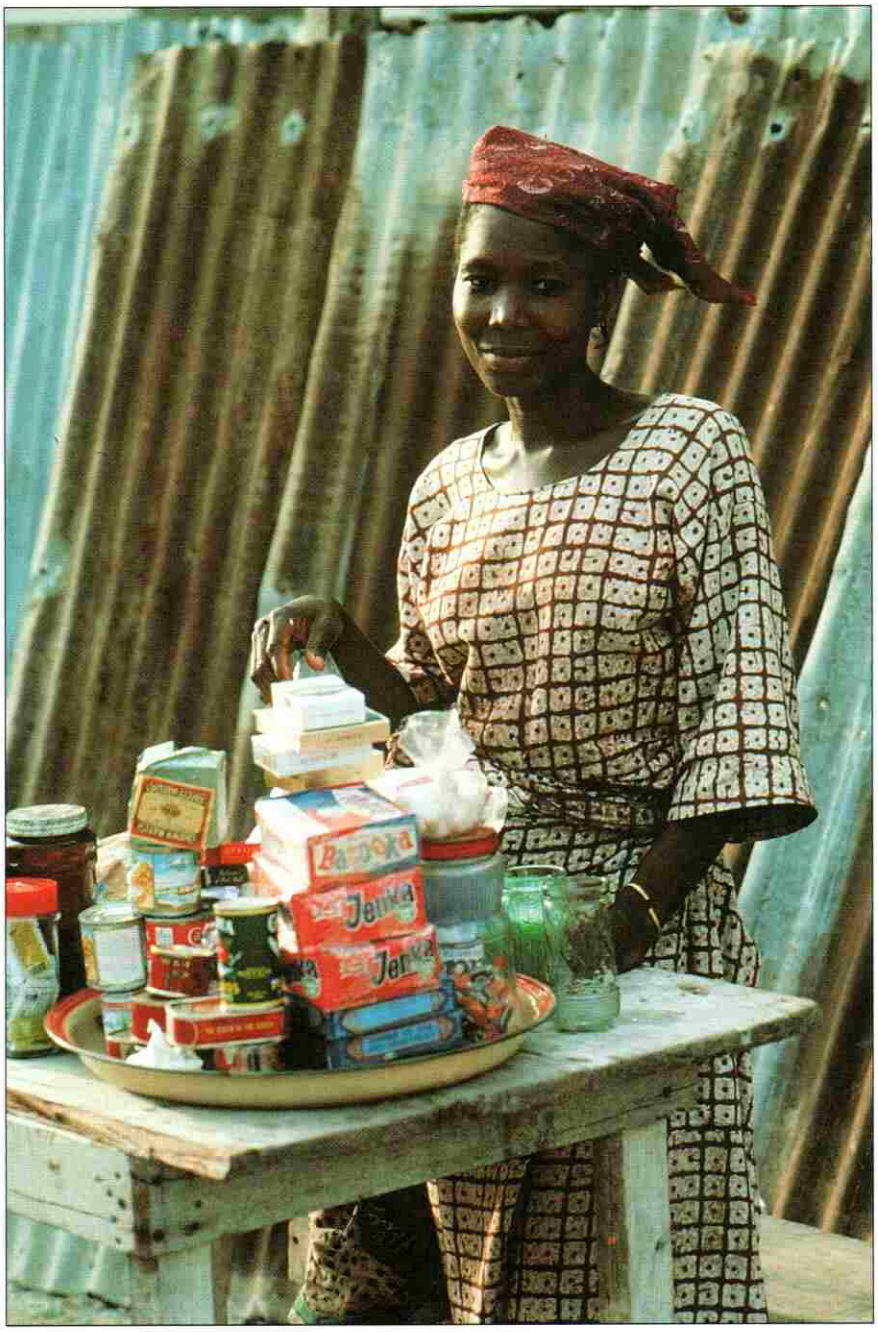
The women spend five days at the Shasha Social Development and Staff Training Institute, Iperu, Ogun State whose principal, Mr Fatai Gbadamosi,

**"Our group grew to 18 because we were so succesful and a man even asked to join. WMTOP ideas are good for men too."**

acts as the Nigerian coordinator for WMTOP. The programme enjoys the blessing of his employer, the Ogun State government, but the cash-strapped authority cannot independently finance the Nigerian pilot which costs US$283,000. Regionally WMTOP costs nearly $1.8 million to run similar pilots in Senegal and Burkina Faso.

Funding comes from the Economic Development Institute (EDI) of the World Bank, which like the Shasha Institute primarily exists to train government functionaries. For both the

**Below:** *A small woman trader sells her wares in Lagos, Nigeria.*



BRUCE PATON/PANOS PICTURES

EDI and the Shasha Institute WMTOP breaks with tradition by training members of non-governmental organizations. It is a new approach and, says the World Bank, WMTOP "plays a key role in the implementation of the Bank's vision and strategic agenda for Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s." The agenda is for self-sufficiency.

Mrs Rosetta Bola Thompson of the Cameroon-based Pan African Institute for Development is the WMTOP director for anglophone West Africa. She believes previous government efforts to involve women in development have failed because government outreach workers are mainly men appealing to a largely male clientele and development funds have by-passed women. Initiatives designed to involve NGOs usually take women to conferences in five star hotels.

"With WMTOP we have tried to take the programme directly to the women. Residential conditions at Shasha are rather basic, but not unlike those the women experience at home. But what the women find amazing is that women 'a cut above' them afterwards come and live with them in the village to follow up on the training," says Mrs Thompson pinpointing the most successful feature of the programme.

The home visits by the ten trainers are also successful because everyone speaks Yoruba fluently. They have translated all the WMTOP materials into Yoruba. Thus 'microproject' became 'Ise Akanse' meaning 'something begun'.

"When we use Yoruba there are no misunderstandings. The English materials are confusing. 'Ise Akanse' is about setting up a business but the English talks about 'Project Identification and Design'. This big, big grammar is not helpful," says Mrs Folake Dawodu, the COWAN trainer who helped Orire Ntemi.

She also helped 'Ore-Ofe' an energetic group of ten young mothers who banded together in 1990 to form a day care centre and nursery school accommodating 200 infants.

Encouraged by the WMTOP training of its members, Ore-Ofe began a tie-dye/batik business to boost funds for the nursery. They plan a pottery too.

"We collected candle stubs from churches for the tie-dye as we couldn't afford new ones," says Mrs Adeitan Adesanya, a founder member. "We used our traditional Ajoojumomo (daily savings) and Esuso (monthly group savings used to provide start-up loans for members). But we still cannot find the money to buy new cloth to dye and sell and we don't have money for clay. We can only redye old outfits."

Re-dying costs 150 naira per outfit, yielding 30 naira profit – not enough to buy one large loaf of bread, or one yam or one fish.

"We can't continue training women in how to start a new business without providing some seed funds," says Mrs Lydia Akande, a retired teacher who has become a trainer.

Not only seed money is needed. "We have only enough money to take WMTOP into 1996," says Mrs Thompson. "We don't want the programme to die but we can't persuade women to pay for their training as it's only afterwards they realize the magnitude of what they've acquired, not before. But we believe that this is one positive programme which interest donors wanting to help Africa." ■

# Widows banding together

On a scorching day in November 1988 more than 500 Indian widows, from many different villages surrounding a town in North Gujarat, gathered in the main square to share common problems, convey a list of their immediate demands to local officials and to work out a plan for future action.

This unique meeting came about through the efforts of Shramjivi Samaj, a local trade union of the poor whose members are mostly women. Everyone was astonished by the daring of the widows, whose militancy defied all traditions. The widows too amazed themselves by their actions, unprecedented in a patriarchal society where widows are seen as inauspicious, and expected to bear their dishonour in silence.

These widows were of all ages, from the very young, some mere children, to the extremely old. They had had enough of the obstructing bureaucracy and were angry about the futility of attempting to obtain the inadequate pensions that some among them – the destitute and the elderly – were on paper entitled to. They wanted legal protection to stay in their homes; to enjoy the inheritance rights given them under the Hindu Succession Law; to retain their dead husband's portion of land to feed themselves and their families. They also asked for proper remuneration for the long hours of work they put in, for example, in the tobacco fields, or as head-loaders, bidi-rollers, or piece-workers. Most of all, they wanted a future for their children, and an end to the dire poverty, degradation and discrimination they experienced due to their widowed state.

Holding informal meetings in each others' houses, at the wells, in the fields, these widows had begun to develop an acute collective awareness of the corruption, the injustice, and the paralysis of the *panchayats* (village councils) which were male-dominated and rarely responded to their complaints. The majority of these widows were illiterate, but by the time the big day arrived they were marvellously articulate, passionately angry, and had shed much of their natural shyness at speaking in mixed company.

The event was a brilliant success. With the help of the local radio and the press, it created public awareness of

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARGARET OWEN

*Margaret Owen*, **a lawyer specializing in women's rights, has been researching a book on the lives of widows. Here she reports on efforts by widows in many countries to band together for social change.**

**Left:** *Widows of the Maniganj district, Bangladesh, hold a meeting.*
**Left below:** *Kodibehn's husband died eight days after she delivered her second child. Abandoned, she became a SEWA member.*

**Below:** *Rampuneet Devi, widowed at the age of seven and tortured by her in-laws, sought refuge in a widows' network.*

issues that had barely been brought to light before, and gave the women themselves a new confidence to lobby for change.

One practical consequence of the rally was that many more widows began to apply, with Shramjivi Samaj support, for the pensions which the State had legislated for them. The administration, attacked by the media, and harangued by other political elements, could do nothing but yield to their demands.

Of course the pensions were quite inadequate to support destitute widowed women, and in any case ceased after six months, but the meeting enormously increased public support for the widows, and has spurred other similar movements in other states in India.

SEWA, the Self-Employed Widows' Association, based in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, is the brain-child of the indefatigable Ela Bhatt. It has been a model, for several years, of how poor women can organize themselves for change and economic independence. Recently SEWA has developed new programmes aimed to assist not only their members who have already been widowed, but to prepare all the women for a usually inevitable widowhood, life on their own or as female heads of households.

Widowhood is inevitable for a majority of women because in all countries widows outnumber widowers, not only because women tend to outlive men even in the poorest countries, but because women usually marry men who are older than themselves.

Since 1994 SEWA members can insure against their husband's deaths for a small premium, and in the event get assistance with funeral expenses, as well as a lump sum or a regular pension. Since it is unlikely that poor developing countries would be able to support any sort of national pension scheme in the foreseeable future, schemes such as SEWA's may influence other grass-roots women's organizations elsewhere to explore how it could be adapted in their localities.

"Ah, if I had only known there was this help when I was widowed", an elderly SEWA group trainer told me. "Now I tell all the younger women to join this scheme. It is only a little extra, but when calamity strikes, one is looked after. And not just materially, we give each other emotional support in times of tragedy." Rudi Ahir has overcome her fears, learnt to deal with government officials and the community now respect her.

SEWA's surveys revealed that many widows are left totally destitute by the time their husbands die; often they have sold all of their assets, such as jewellery, to pay for medicines; are left with heavy debts their men incurred without their knowledge, and are frequently victims of unscrupulous money- lenders who seize their land in

satisfaction. Insurance against illness and accident and death of the main breadwinner, for a small premium, can protect women against sudden family disasters.

Lila's husband had cancer. "He was in the hospital and I did not know how to care for him and for the children, cook, clean and earn at the same time. I had to borrow from so many people because I could not earn. In the end I pawned not just my jewellery, but my cooking pots and blankets. I had nothing left for my daughter's dowries. I wish I had become a SEWA member long ago".

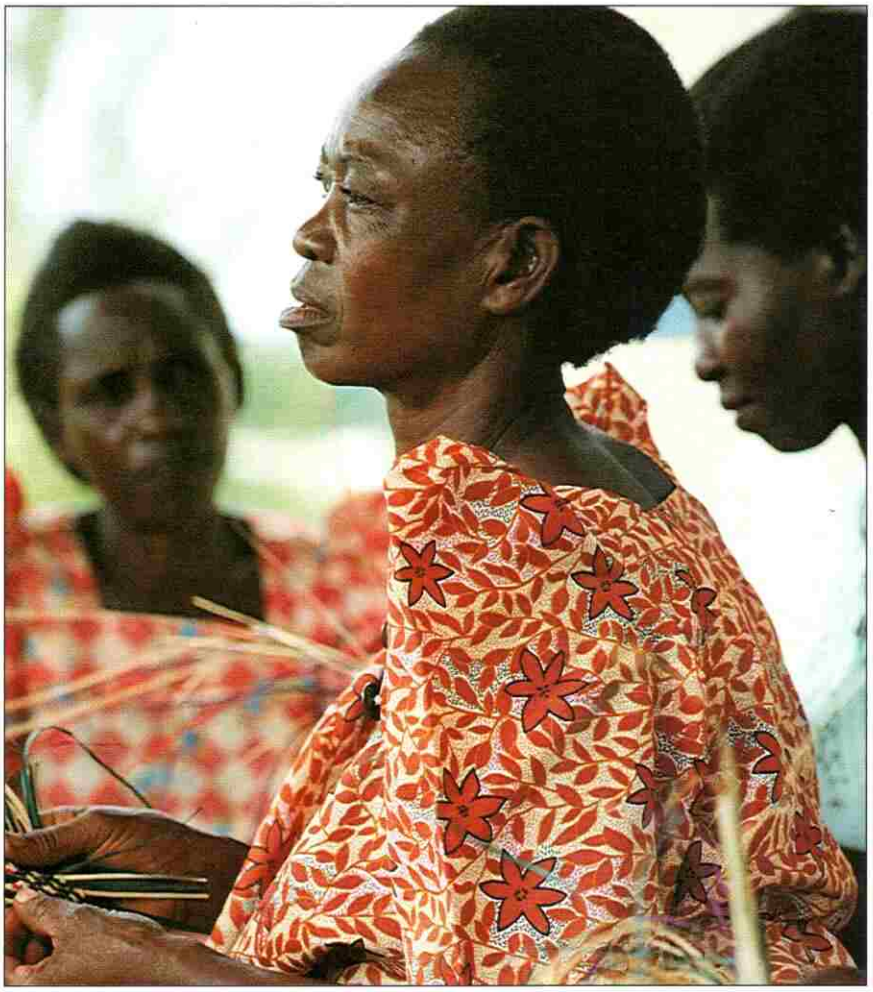
Banu is another SEWA member. The custom of her caste required her to stay indoors for six months after her husband died. "Because of this I could not go out to earn. But Sharda, the local SEWA organizer, learnt of my sorrow and visited to offer sympathies. She made me a member, and after that she came often, and went with me to the *Panchayat* to get back my land from my husband's brothers who had wrongfully taken it from me. I took the organizer to other women in the same plight as myself and now we are all working to help each other".

Similar activities are taking place in Bangladesh. There BRAC, the Bangladesh Committee for Rural Advancement, has been training paralegals in many villages where they have projects. The mullahs and traditional leaders disapprove of this new solidarity and independence among women, and show it by threats and harassment. In some villages the BRAC organizers have been ordered to leave, and cease all their activities.

I met about 200 widows in the Maniganj District. Their paralegal is a young widow called Ishrat. It is to her that the women go at the first signs of trouble. Although under Muslim law a woman is entitled to half her brother's portion of her father's estate, and an eighth of the estate of her husband, in practice she rarely receives her due. Disputes with the husband's family over land are commonplace. Often widows find themselves evicted from their homes, and sometimes their children are taken from them.

Ishrat works to reduce confrontation, and achieve a just settlement. Sometimes she will take a small group of women with her and the plaintiff to confront the defendant with his alleged offence, and try to shame him into surrender of the stolen land and deeds. If this tactic doesn't work, she will represent the widow at the *Salish* (village council). If all else fails, she can ask the BRAC legal office to bring the matter to the courts. News of such challenges to the male-dominated establishment spread like wild-fire, so that everyone becomes better informed about widows' legal rights.

In Uganda there are so many widows, victims of the long war, and of AIDS. As elsewhere on the continent, they are frequently victimized as interpretations of ethnic traditions result in their loss of rights that traditionally they should enjoy. There are countless cases all over West, Southern and East Africa of widows "chased off their land", and made destitute. Last year FIDA (the International Federation of Women Lawyers) and the Ministry of Women's Affairs helped groups of widows to organize a demonstration in Kampala before invited judges, police officers, politicians, and traditional ▶



*Widowed victims of torture in the Luwero Triangle of Uganda meet to make mats and receive counselling if they wish.*

JENNY MATTHEWS/NETWORK

leaders. Individual widows stood up and testified about their harrowing experiences and the refusal of officialdom to protect them. Since then any occurrence of "chasing off widows" makes the front page of the national newspaper.

Two co-widows, fired by the current publicity, who had been sexually abused by their brother-in-law and robbed of all their household furniture, collected a group of ten women, pursued him to his house, brandishing farm implements, sticks, and ropes, screaming for revenge and shouting out his transgressions. The terrified brother-in-law jumped out of a back window promising to return everything.

The scourge of AIDS has ruined the lives of millions of women and children all over Africa, but the realization that the vulnerability of women to HIV infection is due to their powerlessness to negotiate the terms of their sexual relations with men, and the necessity to survive as economically independent main breadwinners has done much to strengthen women's groups. In Kampala Philly Lutaya (named after a popular Ugandan singer who "went public" about AIDS before he died) and TASO (The AIDS Support Organization) have empowered AIDS widows, many infected themselves, to defend their rights, and face up to the pandemic by helping each other, providing shelter, food, medicines, work, and loans for school fees and land. TASO also trains AIDS widows in how to counsel PWAs (people with AIDS) and encourages them to "come out". In addition, TASO teaches widows how to write wills so that they can be sure that their children will inherit their property when they die and not lose it under traditional law.

In Northern Ghana the self-styled "Ministry of Widows" is a grass-roots organization that rescues those women who have been banished from their homesteads, and tries to provide them with income-generating activities and shelter. In Kenya, the Widows and Orphans Societies offer a safety-net for AIDS widows who are reduced to begging and prostitution.

Widows' associations in Africa tend still to be welfare and relief orientated. It is in India that the movements have shed the 'victim' image, become consciously political and give real meaning to that overused but little understood word 'empowerment'. In India, discriminated against and impoverished women are seen as people with vast potential for contributing economically and socially to communities, and who have the will and the skill to obtain this recognition from government.

At a recent Indian Widows Conference held in Bangalore, 49 widows, some of whom had never left their houses since widowhood, met with academics, planners, and activists, and described their histories and their priorities. In a moving ceremony they adorned each other with kumkum, bangles, and coloured saris, and vowed to take the battle for their human rights back to their villages through their local groups. "From now on, no matter how they revile us, we will work together, help each other, and defy anyone who seeks to oppress us," Goda said. "Now I have so many widows coming to my house that I feel strong. My relatives and neighbours realize that even if I have no husband, I have a large family of sisters to support me."

It is unfortunate that the deprivation of widows has received so little attention from the women's movements around the world. But new attitudes will only come about when widows themselves take collective action. The experiences in India show that widows are often capable of being more independent and militant than most married women. Freedom from conjugal control and the need to earn a living often impels them to be more assertive than their married sisters. They can be real agents of change.

The driving force behind any change has, of course, to be the widows themselves. The means of action must involve proper knowledge of rights, legal battles, public lobbying and criticism of political parties, officials, traditional and religious leaders, and local village councils. Success comes when collective action backs up specific demands.

There will be a widows' panel at this year's NGO Forum in Beijing. Hopefully, it will encourage more banding together of bereaved women who should never been seen only as vulnerable, but as people who have much to contribute and who bring about much needed social change. ■

*Margaret Owen's forthcoming book,* The World of Widows, *to be published in 1996 by Zed Books, London, is being researched with a grant from Planet 21 and the Swedish International Development Authority.*

# Fruit and fertility in San Juan de la Manguana

Ana Irsa Aquina, known as Nisoris, is 39. She lives in Maria de los Remedios, a village 12 miles from the Haitian border in the south west province of San Juan de la Manguana, in the Dominican Republic.

Home is a brightly painted wooden house with a thatched roof of banana leaves – typical of rural housing in this tropical climate. Here she wears 'many hats', that of mother of seven children, grandmother, wife and voluntary health facilitator for her community.

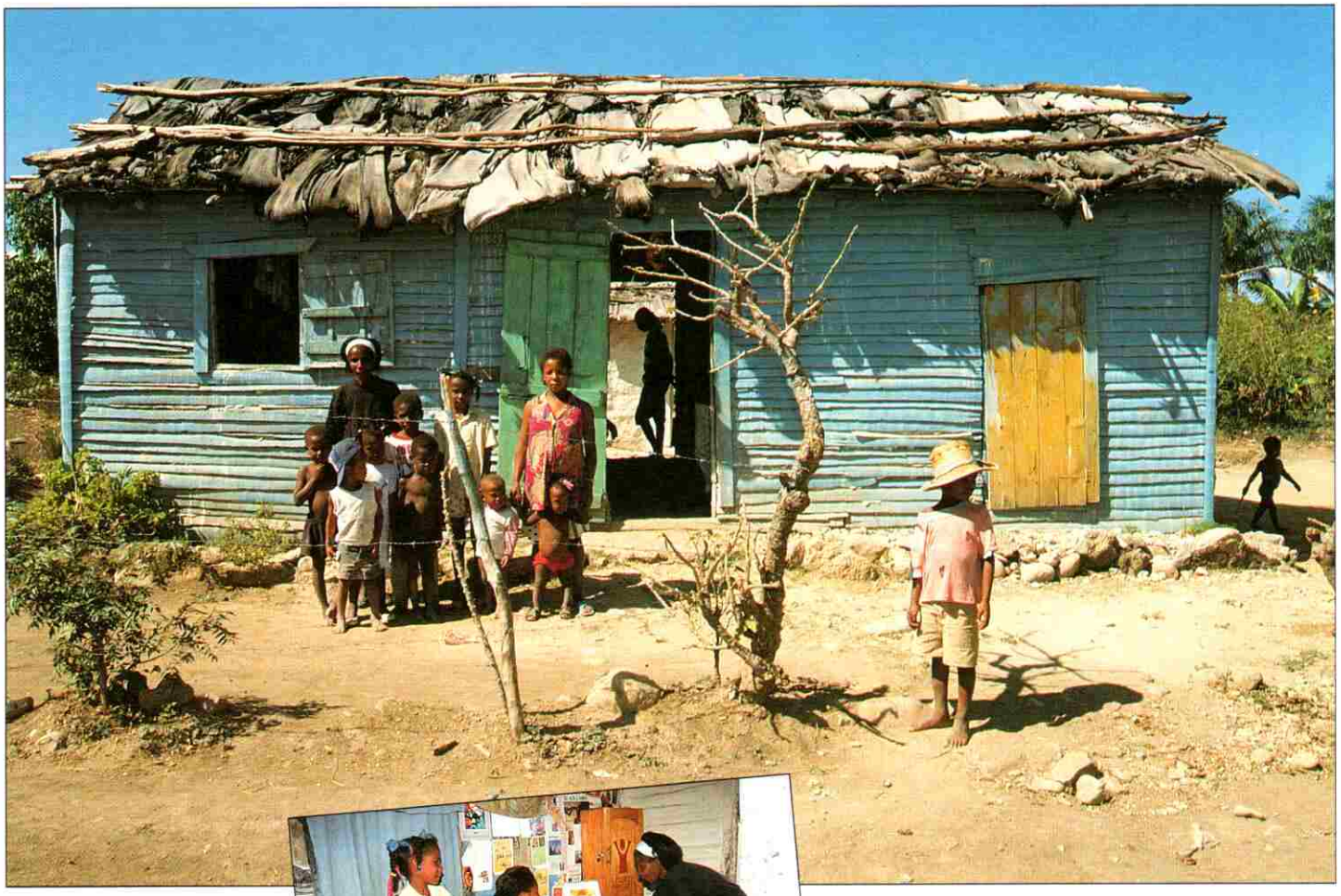
As a health facilitator she counsels women and their partners about reproductive health care and as part of the child survival programme, she educates new mothers about family nutrition, hygiene and the importance of vaccinating their children.

From her 'Botiquin', a simple wooden medical chest, she dispenses common remedies for diarrhoea and respiratory infections and contraceptives – the Pill and the condom being the most available.

The Botiquin is proudly and prominently positioned on the only table in the main room of her home. It bears the Save The Children logo and was financed to Nisoris's community by FUDECO (Fundación para el Desarrollo Communitario), an autonomous Dominican agency and a member of Save The Children Alliance.

FUDECO's involvement in community development in San Juan is tangible. They work in co-ordination with the Farmers' Association, the Youth programme and the Women's Association to develop water systems, health services, schools and agricultural training in soil conservation.

Environmentally, San Juan has widespread deforestation, resulting in soil erosion. This has greatly reduced self-sufficient farming which has ultimately led to a lack of nutrition – primarily Vitamin A deficiency which is a major cause of infant blindness.



ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY NANCY DURRELL MCKENNA

**Above:** *Nisoris with her family in Maria de los Remedios, Dominican Republic.*
**Right:** *Nisoris dispenses common remedies from her botiquin to local people.*

To counter this deficiency, FUDECO, set up in September 1991 a pilot project with one women's group led by Nisoris. The project, 'Solar Drying for Vitamin A', uses the most natural resource – the sun – together with simple technology, and the fruits and vegetables of the season which are rich in Vitamin A, to dry the fruits.

The dried fruit can be eaten like sweets, or combined with a little boiled water to make desserts and pureed baby food. The dried vegetables, such as squash, pumpkin, grated coconut and parsley can be made into a delicious and nutritious soup by adding water to them. Solar drying retains 50-80 per cent of all vitamins and, once bagged, can be stored for six months. In this way, mangoes and papayas and seasonal vegetables can be eaten all year, enriching the family's diet and reducing the wastage of rotting produce.

The pilot project was assessed and found to be a success, apart from minor problems like rats eating produce. The rats were dealt with by putting a door on the community centre.

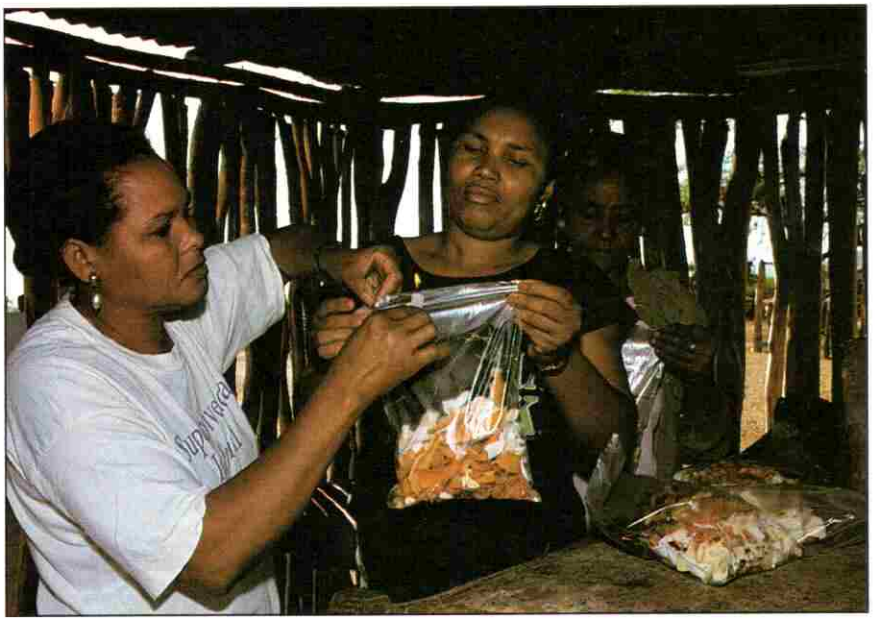
Nisoris's group has since taught six other community groups. As she says, "we have learned what we know – now we teach other women and for that we are happy."

FUDECO supplies the solar driers, made in their workshops and the technical expertise to teach the women. The women harvest and or buy the fruit and vegetables. Until now, what has been dried has been shared among the women, but with their recent success the women's association is hoping to generate income.

During a national holiday, the women brought their solar driers to the main square of town and demonstrated how to solar dry fruits and vegetables, and at the same time expounded the benefits of Vitamin A. Crowds gathered, listened, sampled and wanted to buy the products.

The culmination of enthusiasm and the desire to generate income has prompted the women, together with FUDECO, to explore new methods of sealing and packaging, which would in turn make selling the products to schools, markets, supermarkets and even cinemas and theatres more viable. Currently, they seal the plastic bags with a candle flame – vacuum packing would increase the shelf life, and this potential is now being assessed.

**Far left:** *Women of FUDECO prepare fruit and vegetables for solar drying.*
**Below left:** *Placing fruit in a solar drier.*
**Centre:** *Nutritious sun-dried fruits, rich in Vitamin A.*
**Below:** *Women seal their produce in plastic bags with a candle flame.*



The Women's Association takes pride in coming from a tradition of working together on self-help projects with the men and youth in the community. Nisoris and her group know that they have come a long way since this project was initiated. Eye disease among pre-schoolers is much less prevalent. They now understand, which fruits and vegetables are Vitamin A rich and how to preserve them.

"Now we must share our awareness – we must teach other women – we must generate income. We know that '*La unión hace la fuerza*' – 'Unity brings strength.'" ■

*Nancy Durrell McKenna is a photographer and film-maker, with a special interest in pregnancy, birth and child development.*

# A new kind of leadership

Cecilia López is an effervescent fighter who has made it to the top in a thoroughly machista society. In 1985 she led the Colombian delegation to the Nairobi Conference on Women. Ten years later, as Minister for Environment, she is disappointed by the limited changes that have been achieved.

"Of course, a lot of things have happened but there have been more quantitative advances than qualitative ones. There's a fundamental sense of dissatisfaction among women because problems have not been solved - during the last decade we never touched the real social problem, which is the dependence of women on men. More women are participating, but not on equal terms. Colombia shows clearly that education, by itself, is not enough."

The proportion of women in higher education in Colombia rose from 18 per cent in 1960 to 52 per cent in 1990. But as Ms López points out, much of the increase is due to the number of women training to be teachers and nurses. She herself is an economist with broad experience in research and policy making, both in and out of government.

"My message is that projects in education and health, while necessary, don't touch the essential relations of power in society. We must have a qualitative leap now. It is a question of opening opportunities and empowering women. We have to start a process which attacks the subordination of women to men, and this is much more difficult.

"I'm a Minister, I have prestige and my intellectual capacity is recognized. People can't accuse me of being stupid or inefficient, and I've even been a good mother! Yet I've had to pay a high personal cost for this and if I behave 'like a woman' I'm seen as weak in comparison with men."

In 1982 Ms López was named Vice-Minister of Agriculture by the then president, Belisario Betancur, who decided to fill vice-ministry posts with women as a matter of policy. Although this move was ridiculed as artificial by many people at the time, it had lasting results. Colombia now has more women in high places than many developed countries. However,

SARITA KENDALL

**Women politicians are emerging only slowly as a force for change in the fields of social development and environmental protection. One who has blazed a trail in both is Cecilia López Montaño, now Minister for Environment in Colombia. Our Latin America Correspondent, *Sarita Kendall*, went to meet her.**

relatively few women are elected to office: the proportion on municipal councils and in Congress rarely reaches ten per cent.

Ms López began her crusade to improve the lot of poor, rural women when she was vice-minister, continued it as head of the Social Security Institute (a post that usually torpedoes any career), and is now looking for ways to tackle their problems in an environmental context. The Environment Ministry was created last year and Ms López is not only structuring a national network of research institutes and regional environmental corporations, but also formulating policy to try and re-educate what she calls 'a nation of despoilers'.

"This ministry is defining a sustainable, human development model and women are crucial to the model. They manage natural resources, they are an important productive force and they think in terms of stability and the future. We need to involve them explicitly and work out what this means in practical terms whether in the factories or in the forests. Obviously women are a focus for conservation, but they are also victims. I'm horrified by the toxic waste situation in Colombia. We have to identify the risks of handling waste and fungicides that women are exposed to, especially pregnant women."

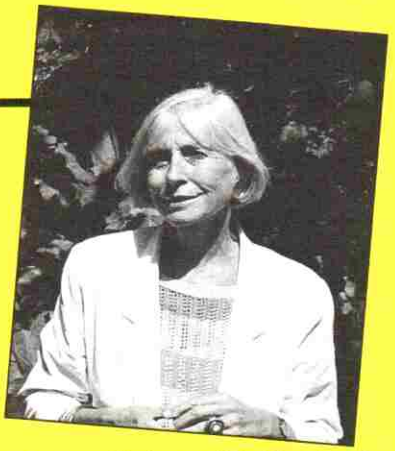
Changing the model that enabled many Colombians to make money by plundering the environment will be a titanic task, says Ms López. She is also concerned that the poor are seen as the main culprits because they cut down trees to get wood for cooking and land for farming. "The irony is that the worst poverty occurs where there are the greatest biological riches, in areas like the Pacific Coast of Colombia. Biotechnology may be the last opportunity for development, and we must take advantage of this."

Despite the number of publications to her name, Ms López is above all a women of action. Out on the Bogotá streets she berates builders for filling public space with construction materials and, when the government raised the idea of turning the Pacific Island of Gorgona into a maximum security prison, she was quick to scotch the proposal.

About one-fifth of Colombian families are headed by women. Ms López, who is separated from her husband, says that the underlying problem for most Colombian women is that their status is defined as a function of the male partner; many put up with the emotional or physical abuse in order to have a husband. "This is not equality, regardless of whether the women's place at work is equal."

Her job as Environment Minister is the toughest and most challenging she has had, according to Ms López. "I feel ready for it, development is my passion. My children are grown-up and I'm full of energy. I have a messianic attitude and I think a new kind of leadership is needed in Colombia - people who speak out, say and do what they think, are not hypocritical." This is what she herself is doing, particularly for women. ■

# The challenge for Beijing



Twenty years ago the UN Decade for Women was launched – followed by a series of conferences from Mexico to Nairobi. As we approach Beijing, still battling for basic social and economic justice, how can women's environmental needs get onto the agenda?

At all of these conferences environment was on the sidelines as health, education, poverty and development took centre stage. If it featured at all, environment was tagged on as an afterthought. It still is. But if you are a woman drinking polluted water your family is bound to get sick; if you are a woman and walking four hours a day to collect fuelwood, you haven't time to farm your garden. For women to be environmentally poor affects every part of their life, health and rights.

Last year, at the Cairo Conference, the focus was on women's reproductive rights. Yet, for the first time, the links between women's rights, economics, sustainable development and environmental issues were recognized. But that was Cairo and the document being presented at Beijing is not as strong as the one that went to Cairo. The weakness of the document, the narrowness of focus, together with the lack of access for NGOs at Beijing, doesn't bode well for taking the linkages further.

In the international political arena the connections between women as environmental managers, farmers, consumers, food producers, labourers, wives and mothers are still not being made. The effects on women of environmental degradation, lack of access to land and credit, and the links between loss of natural resources and poverty are still being inadequately addressed. When projects ignore the role of women within the community and its divisions of labour, they are doomed to failure. The exclusion of women from the planning process undermines traditional ecological practices and increases women's workload. Large-scale commercial exploitation of natural resources, logging and mining, further removes the resource base on which women depend.

At Nairobi, governments, aid agencies and NGOs were called upon to develop gender sensitive programmes which would increase women's access to land, credit, technology and reproductive health. However, it requires a concerted effort by natural resource managers, conservation and development planners, demographers and family planners, to pull all of these things together and to develop the policies that will reconcile land use, development and human demography – problems that increasingly impact on the environment and, therefore, on women's lives.

Within many communities food production is almost totally in the hands of women. In addition to preparing gardens, women do the planting weeding and harvesting. They also often care for livestock. Women produce more than half the world's food yet have title to only one per cent of the world's land. Access to land is central to the health, welfare and social justice of many women. Yet in too many countries the law discriminates against their owning it or having access to credit or to develop it.

Even where land reform has improved the situation, traditional practice and cultural practices can still prevail. Women need to know how to rehabilitate badly degraded land, conserve fragile ecosystems and make use of fuel efficient stoves. Misunderstanding women's roles in project design does not mean merely missed opportunities – it can also mean wrong focus.

In the Philippines, when the government undertook a mangrove management project at Cogtong Bay, they ignored the fact that women were directly dependent on the mangroves to meet their economic needs. The planners made no formal provision for the women to become members of the community associations that were set up to plant and maintain the mangroves. Women were excluded from direct benefits such as land tenure. Formal membership of the land tenure association would have meant access to credit. As a result, the project was undermined.

Women also suffer from lack of forethought when protected areas are created. Many such areas not only overlap the homes of indigenous people but have often been created without consultation with the local communities – and certainly the women – that live nearby and depend on them. Yet women are usually able to list far more uses for forest products than men. Plants for food, for medicine, for animal fodder or to sell all illustrate women's interdependence with natural resources.

For the rural women living in and around the Korup National Park, in Cameroon, the bush mango is a major source of income. Easily transportable, by headload, traders come from Nigeria to buy the mango directly from the women or in exchange for pots and pans or cloth. Only by protecting the interests of those who depend on protected areas can the areas themselves, and all the biodiversity they contain, stay protected.

Environmental degradation, loss of land and access to resources has also meant large scale migration with women left behind to bring up families and to try and scratch a living from small farms over which they have no rights of ownership or to try and find work as migrant labourers. Finally they too are often forced to migrate, living in shanty towns and coping with inadequate shelter and sanitation and unsafe drinking water.

For most rural women, the most urgent environmental problems are the same as they have always been – fuel wood and clean water. The depletion of these has a significant effect on women's daily lives, their health, the health and wellbeing of their families. Deforestation and desertification means less biomass. Fewer wild plants means poorer diet – and the need to buy food. Women know these things.

Providing the ways and means in which women are fully involved in planning, and delivering integrated conservation and development is a long term investment that governments, NGOs, multilateral donor organizations, family planners and project planners – everyone – must recognize and make. ■

*Cherry Farrow is Communications Officer at WWF UK.*

# Associates' NEWS

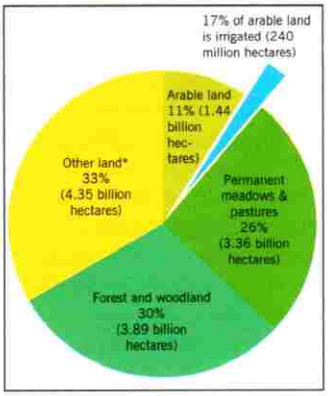
## Food security

With world population growing eight times as fast as cultivated land area, the food security of hundreds of millions of people may by at risk early in the next century, according to a new report, *Conserving Land: Population and Sustainable Food Production*, by Population Action International (PAI).

In the early 1960s, only four countries – Kuwait, Singapore, Oman and Japan – had insufficient arable land to feed their populations without highly intensive agriculture, but they were wealthy enough to either import food or increase agricultural productivity with modern farming methods. By 1990, the number of countries with scarcity of arable land had risen to nine, and included the Netherlands, South Korea and Egypt.

The Earth's Land

Total Area: 13 Billion Hectares


17% of arable land is irrigated (240 million hectares)
Arable land 11% (1.44 billion hectares)
Other land* 33% (4.35 billion hectares)
Permanent meadows & pastures 25% (3.36 billion hectares)
Forest and woodland 30% (3.89 billion hectares)

*'Other land' includes barren and developed land.

By 2025, at least 17 additional countries are projected to join the ranks of countries suffering from a scarcity of arable land, among them some of the world's poorest countries: Somalia, Bangladesh, Kenya, Mauritania and Yemen.

The new study, employs a benchmark of land scarcity conservatively set at 0.07 hectares of arable land per capita – an area less than one-seventh the size of an American football field. Below that, farmers must employ highly intensive and generally expensive agricultural methods – using inorganic nitrogen fertilizer, for example – to feed their countries' peoples.

The PAI study includes data on per capita availability of arable land in 125 countries at three points in time – 1960/61, 1990 and 2025. On a country by country basis, the UN's low and high population projections indicate that arable land scarcity could affect as few as 918 million or as many as 3 billion people, living in between 26 and 37 countries, in 2025.

Under the medium projection, an estimated 2.5 billion out of 8.3 billion, or one in three people, would live in 36 countries with less than 0.07 hectares of arable land per capita. More than half of these would be living in China. The study identifies a three-part strategy for putting food production on a sustainable path:

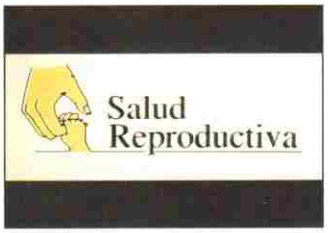
- enhancing the capacity of farmers to grow more and better quality food;
- encouraging the restoration and preservation of the natural resource base; and
- supporting the ongoing decline in rates of population growth by improving health, education and economic opportunities.

"If we can move away from the relentless search for improved yields, we will be better able to conserve and restore soils and water supplies for tomorrow's use," says Engleman. "A long-term strategy integrating agricultural development and population policies would make possible a world in which ending hunger and conserving resources are not at odds with each other."

■ *For copies, contact PAI on: +1 202 659 1833 ext. 133, Fax: 202 728 0745, or e-mail: sae@popact.org.*

## Video power

A 66 per cent increase in clinic attendance marked the first three months of Bolivia's National Reproductive Health Programme (NRHP). Results




are based on comparison of attendance at both public and private family planning clinics during the three months before the launch of the campaign in April 1994. The Ministry of Health sponsored the campaign and President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada and the First Lady joined in the launch. The campaign is a cornerstone of his national plan to reduce maternal and peri-natal mortality.

The campaign included high-quality TV and radio spots on prenatal care, family planning, breastfeeding, and the dangers of abortion. The information, education and communication (IEC) group of the NRHP also produced in-clinic videos for women in clinic waiting rooms. This video series, *De Mujer a Mujer* (From Woman to Woman), consists of three half-hour mini-dramas covering reproductive choices and family planning methods, breastfeeding, spousal communication, and STDs. Bolivia's most famous and best-loved singer, Zulma Yugar, is the lead actress in the first video. Convinced of the importance of the effort, she agreed to play herself when she learned of the production.

■ *Appropriate for use throughout the Andean countries of Latin America, these videos may be obtained from The Johns Hopkins Population Communication Services, which assisted in the campaign. The address is 111 Market Place, Suite 310, Baltimore, MD 21202, USA.*

## The sustainable city

As a contribution to the Habitat II Conference, The Summit of Cities, to be held in Istanbul in June next year, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences has arranged three seminars on the subject of The Sustainable City.

The papers presented at the seminars will be published in a special issue of the Academy's Journal of the Human Environment, *Ambio*, and will also form the basis for the seminar, which will prepare a cross-sectorial statement to be distributed to Habitat II Conference participants in Istanbul.

The focus will be on the local human environment and on the need for cross-sectorial integration.

Four cities have been identified as case studies: Gaborone (Botswana); Riga (Latvia); Hanoi (Vietnam); and Changzhou (China).

■ *Contact: Ms Margareta Wiberg, The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, Box 50005, S-104 05, Stockholm, Sweden. Tel: +46 8 673 9524, Fax: +46 8 15 5670.*

## Family counselling

The Association for Safe and Voluntary Contraception (AVSC) International has published *Family Planning Counselling: A Curriculum Prototype*, designed to improve counselling skills among health and family planning workers. The curriculum provides training in the skills needed to assess clients' needs, to inform women and men about contraception, to help clients make their own choices about contraception and to explain how to use different contraceptives.

SOURCE: FOOD & AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION JHU

It also includes a basic review of family planning methods, reproductive anatomy and physiology and common sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV infection. Information is given on the special needs of adolescents, men, postpartum women, and postabortion women. The material has been used in Africa, Latin America and Asia.

The Curriculum also includes a trainer's manual, a participant's handbook, and two posters of the male and reproductive systems. An accompanying booklet, *Talking with Clients about Family Planning* provides basic information about the full range of contraceptive methods, including hormonal methods, intrauterine devices, barrier methods, sterilization, exclusive breastfeeding and fertility awareness methods.

■ *For further information, contact Pamela Harper, Director of Communications, AVCS International, 79 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016. Tel: +1 212 561 8041, Fax: 212 779 9439.*

## Help for Central Asia

Family Health International (FHI) has been awarded a contract from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to conduct training in several Central Asian Republics. FHI will receive $500,000 for the first year of a multi-year programme.

"For years, people in these newly independent republics have been without a constant supply of contraceptives to space the births of their children," says Beverley Tucker, who is responsible for FHI's work in the former Soviet Union. "In the absence of available family planning services or contraceptive methods, many women in these countries turn to abortion."

Family planning training will be given to obstetricians, gynaecologists and other medical staff in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Topics will include contraceptive safety and technology, counselling and communications. This training will coincide with the provision of contraceptive supplies (condoms, injectables, oral contraceptives and IUDs) from the UNFPA to governments in the region.

FHI works worldwide to improve the quality of family planning services and to prevent sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDs.

■ *For further information contact, Matthew Tiedemann, Programme Officer, FHI, PO Box 13950, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709, USA. Tel: +1 919 544 7040, Fax: 544 7261.*

## Comeback for Arabian oryx

The Saudi Government has successfully introduced 23 captive breeding Arabian oryx, considered extinct in the late 1960s, into the animal's former habitant, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has announced. Its previous home was the unforgiving terrain of the Rub'al-Khali or Empty Quarter, the largest uninhabitable desert in the Arabian Peninsula.

The release took place at a ceremony in the recently created 'Uruq Bani Ma'arid Protected Areas of the Rub'al-Khali in March. The animals were descendants of four oryx presented by the late King Abdulaziz to WWF, in 1963, to strengthen the world herd for breeding in captivity.

Dr Claude Martin, WWF Director General, who attended the occasion, said "Today the world is face with environmental degradation on a global scale. We need more examples of such successful schemes. It will send a message of hope to those who are succeeding us on this planet, and are desperately looking for solutions to the world's problems."

The reintroduction of the oryx is part of a much wider programme to restore some of Saudi Arabia's diverse natural habitat and wildlife populations. A System Plan of Protected Areas, established with World Conservation Union (IUCN) assistance, is already in place. This plan has identified 56 terrestrial and over 50 marine reserves to be established in 10 years.

## Cairo commitment

The Japanese Government has demonstrated its continuing commitment to family planning and reproductive health aid by increasing its contribution to IPPF and UNFPA to US $71 million in 1995. The amount allocated to IPPF has not yet been decided, but it will certainly exceed the US $17.9 provided in 1994.

The British Government has also announced additional grants to IPPF, totalling £2.7 million ($4.3 million). £1.5 million ($2.4 million) extra has been contributed to IPPF's programme and £1.2 million ($1.9 million) is being provided for contraceptive supplies to Moldova, Latvia and Albania, as well as training and service delivery in Moldova, Russia and the Central Asian Republics.

OLIVIER LANGRAND/WWF

## Population Award

IPPF Secretary-General Dr Halfdan Mahler has received the 1995 United Nations Population Award. The award is presented annually to individuals and institutions which have made outstanding contributions to increasing the awareness of population problems and to their solutions.

Mahler shares the Award with the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children, which conducts pioneering research and programmes to combat harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation.

■ IPPF has announced that the former Director of the WHO Office at the UN, Mrs Ingar Brüggemann, will take over as Secretary-General when Dr Mahler retires in September. A German social scientist, Mrs Brüggemann is Chair of the Development Policy Forum of the German Foundation for International Development, Berlin.

## Taking a lead in education

IUCN is taking a lead with UNESCO in attempting to improve the management of environmental education.

Following a meeting between European civil servants and NGOs from 25 countries and staff from the European Union, UNESCO and IUCN, in Gland last November, a small working group has met to plan ways of improving policy formulation in Europe for environment and development education. These include influencing the Environmental Ministers' Conference in Sophia, and other inter-governmental forums in Europe.

To support education and information officers in Latin American governments, IUCN and UNESCO are to hold a similar meeting in Ecuador in October.

■ *Associates' News is compiled by* Maya Pastakia *to whom all contributions should be addressed.*

# FILMS

## Learning for life

Three *People & the Planet* videos on themes relating to the Beijing Conference on Women are now available, or in production.

The first of these half-hour productions, entitled *Victory for Women*, summarizes the positive messages from last year's Cairo Conference on Population and Development, and looks at these from the perspective of families in Egypt and Colombia.

The film shows how Egypt has made headway in moving away from top-down 'population control' programmes to more sensitive reproductive health approaches. It also reports on how IPPF's affiliate in Colombia, Profamilia, has embraced both men and young people in its 'people-centred' approach to family planning and linked this with other legal and health services.

*Victory for Women* is now available in four language versions: Afro-Caribbean English, Afro-Caribbean French, Asian-English and Latin American Spanish, each with a presenter from a different region.

A second film, entitled *Learning for Life*, looks at successful examples of extending education to women and girls – and the impact this is having on their lives – with a special focus on Senegal and Bangladesh.

In Senegal, where three women out of four over the age of 15 are illiterate, the film reports on the work of one

NGO, called TOSTAN. This has succeeded in making learning both fun and relevant for village women, improving their skills and increasing their confidence.

In Bangladesh, producer Rosanna Horsley has worked with a local film company, Audio-Visual Communications, to highlight the work of BRAC in educating children – especially girls – who have never attended state school, or have dropped out. With 29,000 schools, all of them local and often open for only a few hours a day, this project provides a lifeline to many parents who would otherwise keep their daughters at home.

A third film builds on this issue of the magazine, on *Women: A Power for Change*. Made by North-South Productions in partnership with Marcia Forbes of Phase Three Productions in Jamaica and Pinty Rao of RKO Films in Bombay, it tells the stories of two successful women's communication projects.

In Jamaica, the Sistren Theatre Collective has used street theatre and theatre workshops to mobilize all sectors of society, while in Ahmedabad, India, the Self Employed Women's Association has used video to highlight their struggle for better conditions (see page 12).

■ *All these films are available through through TVE, The Centre for Environmental Communications, Prince Albert Road, London NW1 4RZ. Tel: +44 171 586 5526, Fax: 586 4866, e-mail: tve-uk@geo2-geonet.de.*

## Half the sky

To raise awareness of the Beijing conference, and the fierce arguments still raging in the run-up to it, TVE is co-producing four new films in its award-winning *Developing Stories* from Southern directors. But this time there's a new twist: the films in this – the third series – are made by *women* directors from the South, presenting audiences around the world with their own, unique perspective on gender – and the traditional practices, prejudices, imagined barriers and glass ceilings that still stand in the way of women's equality.

Among the films are *Half the Sky*, a documentary from Wang Haowei of the Beijing Film Studio, exploring the lives of four generations of women in the Xie family – and the bewildering transformations in women's lives in China over the past 50 years that their own stories illuminate. Produced by Sun Shuyun, and based on a nationwide Chinese oral history project, the 60-minute film takes its title from Mao Zedong's dictum that 'Women hold up half the sky' as the equal of men.

*Hanan Ashrawi – A Woman of Her Time* is an intimate portrait of the woman who played a key role in negotiating the Palestinian/Israeli peace accord. Directed and produced by prize-winning director Mai Masri, the film explores Hanan Ashrawi's early family life, her first encounters with the PLO, and her struggle to reconcile the demands of her public persona with her role as wife and mother – in a region where democracy has so far had little impact on the status of women.

In contrast, *Rising Above: Women of Vietnam* from Lebanese film-maker Heiny Srour and associate producer Thu Ngyun explores the dynamics of sexual politics today in Vietnam – a country where women fought alongside men as equals during the long dark days of the Vietnamese war. Now, the film asks, are the revival of Confucianism and the spread of market forces conspiring to relegate women once again to the role of second class citizens? *Jenny Richards*

■ *Contact TVE, as above.*

## The last migration

In 1988 a herd of 18 wild elephants descended on Sarguva, a peaceful rural belt of tribal farmers in eastern Madhya Pradesh where the local people could not remember seeing wild elephants for over 100 years. Each night the elephants would emerge from the teak forest to rampage through the local villages, indiscriminately knocking down houses and trampling crops in search of food.

At first the villagers regarded the elephants with reverence, as representatives of the divine god Ganesh. But as the nightly mayhem continued, and the terrified people were forced to abandon their homes each day at dusk to seek refuge in the tree-tops, their fear hardened into hostility.

By 1993, the elephants had killed 45 people, and the Madhya Pradesh government had a crisis on its hands. Indian film-maker Mike Pandey's extraordinary film is the story of what happened next to capture and remove the elephants.

Mike Pandey spent over a year making the film, which deservedly won the first TVE award for developing country film-makers at the Wildscreen Festival in Bristol in October 1993. He is now shooting the sequel, which will follow the progress of the herd as they are trained to help with forestry and building work. TVE will be distributing the film later this year. *Jenny Richards*

■ *Contact TVE, as above.*

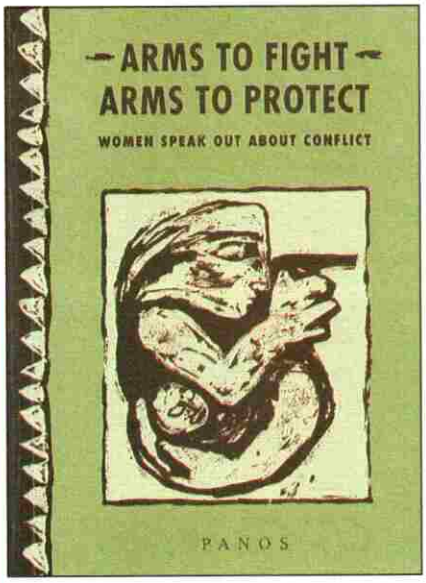
# BOOKS

## Changed by war

**Arms to Fight - Arms to Protect: Women Speak Out About Conflict**
Edited by Olivia Bennett and others
*Panos, London, 1995, £10.95*

**Let the Dawn Come. Social Development: Looking Behind the Clichés**
Edited by Simon Burne and others
*Panos, London, 1995, £8.95/$13.95*

Conventional perceptions of women as passive victims of war are dispelled by the personal accounts which make up this important book. Women fight, support the same causes as men, campaign against unjust and oppressive regimes and take sides in ethnic struggles.




Panos, the London-based development information organization, has documented women's perceptions and understanding of their experiences during conflict. The results are to be used to promote change in the participating communities.

"It cannot be assumed that women are by nature more likely to work for non-violence and peace than men," Panos concludes form the more than 200 interviews carried out with women worldwide, 85 of which are published here.

There are many harrowing tales, for example of the Vietnamese woman who watched helplessly as her husband and three children slowly and painfully succumbed to the effects of Agent Orange. But there are also tales of great courage and bravery in circumstances where being a woman means being used as a deliberate instrument of war.

The lives of the women who speak out in this book were changed forever by war. While much of the effect was negative – widowhood, loss of sons, trauma and social rejection as a result of rape and prostitution – there were also positive changes such as increased independence, participation in group activities, freedom to earn a livelihood and take part in decision-making.

The single most important message to emerge is that women, with their resilience, self-reliance and resourcefulness, are the key players in the rebuilding of war-torn societies. Men's lives are frequently disorientated by long periods of fighting and by the failure of stagnant economies to reward them with permanent jobs. Aid agencies and NGOs that ignore women's experiences and responses to conflict and its aftermath are misdirecting their efforts.

In another initiative from Panos, women predominate in a new series of case studies from developing countries simply because they are the poorest and most overworked segments of nearly every society.

Prepared for the Social Summit but equally relevant to Beijing, the studies from Guatemala, India, Uganda, Zimbabwe and Bangladesh are, above all, a medium for local voices to be heard. The authors, all local journalists, have taken soundings of local opinion in poor communities affected, one way or another, by organized development activities.

The result is that the studies are both analytical and prescriptive, revealing many of the causes of failure and arriving at a remarkable consensus on the factors for success. Community involvement, partnership and participation, especially of women, all call for much greater understanding of the subtleties and uniqueness of different cultures and power structures.

Promising grassroots activities, however, must coexist with the negative economic and political situations in which they operate. "Good development programmes can create 'pools of development', benefiting particular communities or groups of people, but they will be little more than candles lighting a dark cavern unless we address the wider forces that effect them"

*Frances Dennis*

## Making a difference

**Human Rights of Women: National and International Perspectives**
Edited by Rebecca Cook
*University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994, £20.95, $52.50*

In this useful compilation, edited by Professor Rebecca Cook, 23 contributors address the question of how respect for human rights can make a difference in the reality of women's lives.

Treating this subject at national, regional and international levels, the authors describe recent developments in the law relating to women. For instance, at the national level Maria Isabel Plata discusses changes in Colombian law relating to women's reproductive health, and describes how women's groups have used the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to spur the creation of a 1992 policy on Health for Women.

At the regional level, Chaloka Beyani describes how the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights has been used to ensure equal treatment of women in their ability to inherit land in a 1990 decision of the High Court of Tanzania and equal treatment of women in their ability to convey nationality to their children in the famous 1992 *Unity Dow* decision in the Court of Appeal of Botswana.

At the international level, Andrew Byrnes looks at procedures whereby the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women can hear complaints about violations of women's rights. At its January 1995 meeting, the committee outlined some ideas on a complaints procedure for possible consideration by the UN Commission on Status of Women and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

## Power surge

**Power Surge - A Guide to the Coming Energy Revolution**
Christopher Flavin and Nicholas Lenssen
*Earthscan, London, 1995, £10.95.*
*W W Norton, New York, $14.95*

Flavin and Lenssen's excellent book is much more than a guide to the coming energy revolution: it also provides an illuminating account of the history of energy use.

Both authors, researchers at the Worldwatch Institute, have done an admirable job in explaining how the world uses energy, for what purposes and what the latest trends portend. And they chart the switch to alternative fuels and the use of renewable sources of energy, such as solar, wind, geothermal and tidal – a process which is much further along than most people realize. Indeed, the price per kilowatt hour of most of these 'fringe' energy sources is now approaching the cost of fossil fuels.

Another essential part of this revolution, and one often overlooked by others, is the impact that energy conservation and efficiency measures have had on demand. For example, while the US economy expanded by 57 per cent in the past 20 years energy use rose by only 15 per cent. Much of the saving came from innovations in lighting, improved building codes, and the widespread introduction of more fuel efficient cars and household appliances.

This book is a 'must' for anyone seriously interested in energy futures, and how we got to where we are.

*Don Hinrichsen*

# People & the Planet

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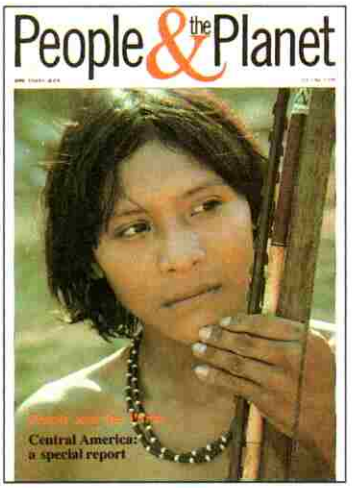


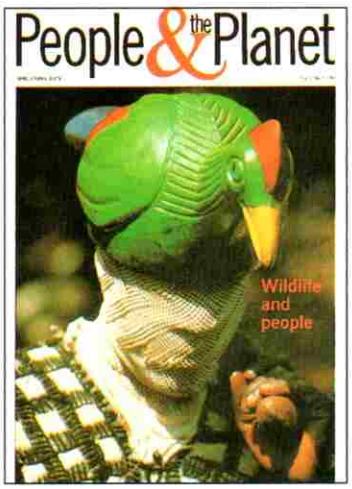


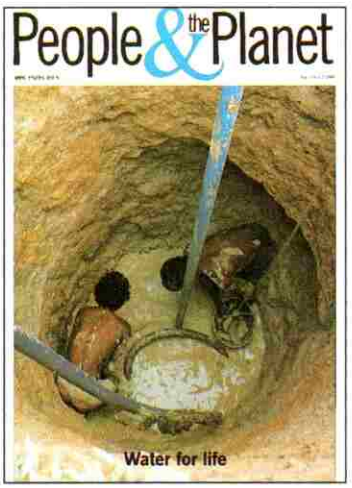


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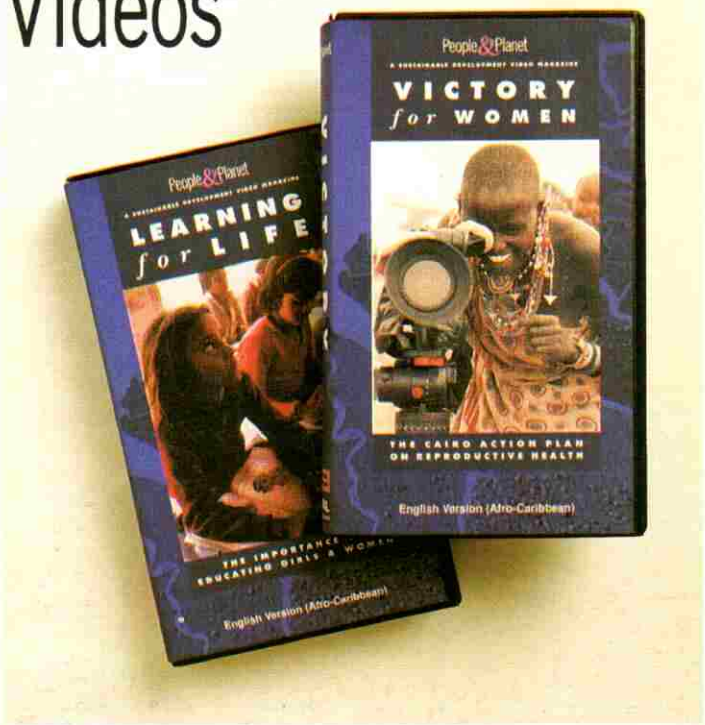
# Videos




Now available. Our first two half-hour videos, focusing on the empowerment of women.

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